A Critical Study of the Writings of Mary Hays, With an Edition of her Unpublished Letters to William Godwin.

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WRITINGS OF MARY HAYS, WITH AN EDITION OF HER UNPUBLISHED LETTERS TO WILLIAM GODWIN.

Mary Hays has been recognized as a feminist, a novelist, and as a political writer of some influence in the later eighteenth century. However, her philosophical concerns have tended to be overlooked or minimized. This study will stress that her engagement with the philosophies of Claude-Adrien Helvetius and of William Godwin had a direct influence on her writings and that it is essential that the centrality of this engagement be seen in order for her writings to be fully understood and their importance recognized. Rather than being on the margins of philosophical discussion Hays emerges as a woman at the centre of it. Moreover, her relationship with Helvetian and Godwinian philosophies reveals Hays as struggling to find a systematic way of dealing with her own experience as a woman. Hence, she adopted a variety of 'voices', such as those offered by Dissent, sensibility and Enlightenment philosophy, to enable herself to turn her position of inferiority as a woman into a more empowering and challenging one. Hays wanted to embrace the cause of radical politics as embodied by Godwin's thinking, anticipating its suitability as another empowering voice, but quickly found it to ignore the 'injustice' inherent in 'sexual distinctions', despite its insistence on the importance of circumstances. Her writings increasingly point out both the incongruity of this omission from its radical agenda and its uncompromisingly rational foundation. Extensive reference to their correspondence shows her serious and systematic use of philosophical discourse, and suggests that she may have had a direct influence on Godwin's own philosophy, the implications of which he was rethinking during their friendship. Finally, I argue that Hays's experience, which she systematically examined in her writings, proved to her the inadequacies of any philosophy in confronting the problems fundamental to the female position.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

> Do not be a martyr to philosophy, which you will be, if you do not take more exercise, be a little more foolish, and look at the world with all its awkward things, its clumsy, lumpish forms, its fools, its cockscombs, and its scoundrels with more endurance.[1]

This study makes no pretensions to provide full biographical coverage of Hays's life (1759-1843) or a comprehensive, critical exploration of the total range of her works. A thesis produced in 1971 purports 'to provide a definitive study of her literary achievements [...] and to place the complete corpus of Hays' extant works (ten in all) in the perspective of the literature of her time [...]'[2] and I am indebted to this exhaustive study of the author and her background.[3] However, as the preface to her thesis declares, Gina Luria had deliberately excluded consideration of the correspondence between Hays and William Godwin, then recently purchased by the Pforzheimer Library, New York, as she had intended future publication of it.[4] Subsequently, the project was abandoned. I have made extensive use of this correspondence to explore Hays's novels and to challenge much of the adverse criticism surrounding her writing, which I believe is based on misreadings of the texts themselves as well as on a willingness to emphasise the notoriety surrounding the authoress as a female and then as a female Jacobin.

Rather, I am focusing on the aspects of Hays's life which enabled her to articulate her concerns through a series of social and intellectual 'voices' which she systematically experimented with, but ultimately rejected. It seems likely that Hays felt a need to affix a label on herself whether it were Dissenter, Wollstonecraftian, Helvetian or Godwinian, and this need suggests that she was searching for an identity in a shifting and perplexing political and philosophical climate. The adoption of an identifiable 'position' might have suggested to her security and control. Most importantly, I am concentrating on the means she adopted in order to justify her apparent 'failure' to live up to the ideals of William Godwin.

Throughout this study I am using the term 'Jacobin' in its loosest sense to denote what has been seen as 'a state of mind, a cluster of indignant sensibilities, a faith in reason, a

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1 Undated letter to Mary Hays from George Dyer. See *The Love-Letters of Mary Hays (1779-1780)* ed. by A.F.Wedd (London: Methuen, 1925), p. 239. Much of the biographical material in this chapter is taken from this work and where appropriate subsequent references to it will be placed in parenthesis in the text as *Love-Letters*.

2 Gina Luria, 'Mary Hays: A Critical Biography', (Unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 1972), p. 31. Subsequent references are to Luria, 'Mary Hays'.

3 A thesis by Sandra Findley, 'Feminist Politics and the Fiction of Eliza Fenwick, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1982), has also been consulted. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to refer to this study because of stated restrictions on its material.

4 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. iv.

vision of the future',[5] rather than as a term relating specifically to the political turmoil caused by the French Revolution. For instance, John Thelwall claimed to 'use the term Jacobinism simply to indicate a *large and comprehensive system of reform'*.[6] If, indeed, the term encapsulates the arbitration of the reason and excludes distinctions based on 'money, age, rank, sex, or physical strength',[7] then Hays was right to see in Jacobinism a means of empowerment for women. She might be forgiven for believing that, like Dissent, it would automatically support the non-gendered participation of those seeking radical progress. Hence, Jacobinism would have seemed to be attractively enabling to women who, formerly, had been encouraged, if not forced, to see themselves as living on the margins of political discourse. In fact, Jacobinism might be said to be the ultimate adoptable 'voice' for a woman experiencing isolation and looking for liberation and this is substantiated by Hays's excited response to Godwin's *Political Justice.*[8] Whatever its specific origins, 'stigma' early came to be attached to the term,[9] and Hays lived long enough to experience at first hand the reactionary backlash to Jacobinism.

There have been major problems influencing the way Hays's writings have been evaluated and Coleridge's assessment of Hays is famous:

> Of Miss Hay's intellect I do not think so highly, as you, or rather, to speak sincerely, I think, not *contemptuously*, but certainly very *despectively* thereof. - Yet I think you likely in this case to have judged better than I. - for to hear a Thing, ugly & petticoated, ex-syllogize a God with cold-blooded Precision, & attempt to run Religion thro' the body with an Icicle - an Icicle from a Scotch Hog-trough - ! *I* do not endure it! - my Eye beholds phantoms - & 'nothing is, but what is not.'-[10]

Hays's position as a woman has tended to cloud her position as a radical, but I shall argue that, for her, gender was very much a central issue of her radicalism and also that her ostentatious projection of herself as challenging ideas of 'the feminine' has exacerbated an unsympathetic response to her work. However we read her personal position, there seems no doubt that she was less likely to be taken seriously by <u>any</u> party because she was a woman. Her gender has tended to undermine what might be seen as a substantial contribution to late eighteenth-century politics. Too many critics have tended to agree that

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5 Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Scribner, 1968), p. v.

6 Quoted in E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 200.

7 Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 6.

8 William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its influence On Modern Morals and Happiness*, 2 vols (London: Robinson, 1793). See Appendix One, Letters 1 and 2. All references to the Hays/Godwin correspondence collected in Appendix One will hitherto be given in parenthesis in the text. Unless stated otherwise all letters are from Hays.

9 Thompson, p. 200.

10 Letter to Robert Southey, January 25 1800. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. by E.L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), I, p. 563.

'it would not do to take Mary Hays very seriously' ,[11] and the majority underestimate her power of argument and her systematic attempts to understand the thinking of the radicals she sought to join.

Mary Hays is interesting not only for her life but also for its longevity in that she, unlike Wollstonecraft, was able to experience at first hand, almost into the mid-nineteenth century, changes in social and political thinking, and thereby offer a greater perspective on the Jacobin position: its successes and failures. Her letters testify that she would also have experienced specific changes in the thinking of perhaps the greatest radical, William Godwin; changes which have been largely attributed to the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft but which I shall argue may have been also dependent on his philosophical relationship with Mary Hays. These letters have formed a substantial part of my assessment of Hays's writing.

This first chapter will explore briefly Hays's biographical details,[12] the radical circle she moved amongst, the influence of Helvetian and Godwinian philosophy on her work, indicate the extent of her writings and her influence on the reading public and critics, and show reactions to her as an individual and as a writer. Because her personal conduct was often confused with that of her fictional heroines, I have felt it necessary to explore the confusion surrounding her writings. I shall suggest that her earliest experience of philosophy equipped her with the assumptions to enable her to anticipate a fulfilling life for herself and her heroines. Further experience similarly provided philosophical reasons for this anticipation to be thwarted. Hence, this study will examine the philosophical inevitability of failure.

Chapter two will show that Hays became involved with some of the leading Dissenting influences of the age, and we shall see how the foundations of Dissent almost completely concurred with her chosen Helvetian philosophy whilst also informing Godwin's. Recent studies on Dissenting attitudes to women reveal why women such as Hays would find in them an atmosphere conducive to their search for greater equality and opportunity and we shall see how important an influence Dissent was as a movement which was to enable her to articulate some central concerns for women of the latter half of the century. My argument is that the model of Dissent provided Hays with a way of articulating problems inherent in a mode of living which were particularly relevant to the position of women. Dissent's link with radicalism will also reveal why Hays might have anticipated an easy entrance into Godwin's plans for 'utility' and 'general good'.[13] Many of the radicals with whom Hays was to become acquainted were similarly raised on Dissenting principles, most notably Godwin himself whose 'defence of the individual's right and duty of private judgement, his account of virtue and his argument for the impelling nature of moral truth -

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11 Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 58.

12 See Luria 'Mary Hays' for more comprehensive coverage.

13 Both terms are fundamental to Godwin's philosophy and will be examined fully in chapter three.

are all paralleled in the theologically inspired works of Rational Dissenters writing in the second half of the eighteenth century'.[14]

Hays's adopted religion of Dissent enabled her to reconcile herself to a life of non-conformity; her adopted Helvetian philosophy enlarged this into a celebratory affirmation of it. Both led to her perception of her inferiority as being socially constructed and, hence, excusable. Both gave her the power to challenge this inferiority. For this study it is important to see how much Hays was able to rely on Dissent not only providing her with a means of finding a way out of her inferior female position but it was also the influence which propelled her into publication which inevitably helped challenge such a position.

Rather than being brought up as a Dissenter, as has been thought, it is more likely that she was introduced to religion by attending the Anglican Church of St Olave in the parish of Southwark, London.[15] At some time she began attending a Nonconformist chapel at Southwark which her first love, John Eccles, also joined.[16]

Her correspondence, firstly with John Eccles, and later with Hugh Worthington (1752-1813), John Disney (1746-1816) and Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), reveals a young woman in active and articulate debate with Dissent's spirit of enquiry,[17] whilst attending Coachmaker's Hall in 1779 and, at least between 1791 and 1794, Salter's Hall, which was under the ministry of the Rev. Hugh Worthington,[18] and also in 1793 - 95, Essex Street Chapel,[19] under Theophilus Lindsey[20] and Dr John Disney, for whom Hays is thought to have written sermons (see *Love-Letters*, p. 6). She not only attended worship but was a frequent guest at the Worthington and Disney homes,[21] and received them at her family home along with the famous Unitarian, Joseph Priestley.

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14 Mark Philp, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Duckworth, 1986), p. 10.

15 The records of her own, her brother and sister's christenings are traced to this orthodox Church. Mary was christened 16 May 1759. Her parents were William and Ann.

George Dyer made the following suggestive distinction between the beliefs of the daughter and mother: 'I beg my respects to any of yr friends, who enquire after me, whether they are disciples of Helvetius, or like your good mother, continue true and faithful to Jesus Christ' (*Love-Letters*, p. 239). Hays also claimed that her mother 'felt some uneasiness from, what she conceived to be, a dangerous freedom' in her daughter's opinions (see Letter 11).

16 See *Love-Letters*, pp. 3-4. However, I have traced John Eccles' grave to the parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Fordingbridge, and not to the 'little deserted Meeting House burial-ground' as claimed by Wedd, *Love-Letters*, p. 14, which similarly undermines the extent of their non-conformity.

17 The terms Dissenting and Unitarian will be used interchangedly to denote a shared attitude of religious enquiry. According to Erik Routley, *English Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960): 'When we come to the eighteenth-century 'Dissent' clearly carries a wider meaning. The 'Dissenting Deputies', [...] were chosen from Presbyterian, Baptist and Congregationist churches, and in 1732, at the foundation of that body, "Dissent" meant the whole body of those who were not communicant members of, and habitual worshippers with, the Church of England. In fact, it meant by then "Non-conformity"' (p. 8).

18 Later one of the first tutors at Hackney New College founded in 1786 and which Hays is thought to have attended. See letter from Hugh Worthington to Hays, 16 June 1791. Dr Williams's Library.

19 Considered to be 'a hot bed of radicalism, and sermons were under surveillance'. *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals* ed. by Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman, 2 vols (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), I, p. 125.

20 'The founder in the formal sense of English Unitarianism' (ibid., pp. 290-91).

21 See various correspondence in Dr Williams's Library, from John Disney to Hays and Hugh Worthington to Hays. See especially letter from John Disney, 21 June 1793. Dr Williams's Library.

More particularly we shall see how Hays and her sister were directly influenced by Dissenting ministers to pursue literary careers. Indeed, it was her participation in a controversy begun by a leading Dissenter, Gilbert Wakefield which first propelled her into publication with *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Workship* (1792). Dissent, then, was one of the first 'voices' available to Hays and which was to encourage her own voice to be made public.

However, Hays had already shown that she was a person eager to celebrate her enthusiastic responses to experience and her unwillingness to compromise this experience. The fashionable mode of articulating this expressiveness was sensibility and Hays adopted this wholeheartedly as her letters to her first lover reveal (see *Love-Letters*). But, it is essential for this study that the proximity of sensibility to both Dissent and to the philosophical position she adopted is recognized, so that it, also, may be seen to have provided an entry into further enabling 'voices' for Hays.

It could be claimed that Hays had already begun to write in terms of sensibility as early as 1779, during her youthful correspondence with John Eccles.[22] Here Hays declared her belief in the power of receptive response:

> I am a perfect enthusiast in my approbation of the country, as indeed I am of everything; there is no exertion of the human mind, no effort of the understanding, imagination, or heart, without a spark of this devine fire. Without enthusiam, genius, virtue, pleasure, even love itself languishes; all that refines, adorns, softens, exalts, ennobles life, has its source in this principle. (*Love-Letters*, p. 49)

Here she shows how she exults in the idea of response, even if it is a painful one, seeing in its very pain a propensity for its corollary, pleasure, and she stresses an ability to feel, however painful, a position which sensibility exalted, as it did a sense of being set apart or 'different' as the next letter similarly suggests:

> The giddy, the gay, the inconsiderate, the unfeeling - they are happy; while those whose souls are replete with sensibility, whose sentiments are refined, and those who are formed tremblingly susceptible of every softer emotion, - they drink deep of the cup of misfortune [...]. (*Love-Letters*, pp. 28-9)

This conveys a confused notion of what was later to be a methodized consideration of sensationalism. Sensibility was to become problematic for Hays, as for so many women when they were urged to see its potential for excess. As we shall see, Hays adopted a more critical stance towards its negative qualities, being obliged to locate her own, and her heroine Emma Courtney's, problems within this early adoption of the cult.

Her letters to Eccles are of interest because they reveal a woman who is looking for both a foundation on which to evaluate her experience and an attempt to schematize this

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22 Hays was only 19 when her clandestine letters to her lover began.

foundation. Her accompanying Journal to her second volume of love letters shows that she was already seeing her experience in terms of its future usefulness:

> "Should this book ever fall into the hands of those who make the human heart their study, they may, it is possible, find some entertainment, should the papers continue legible, in tracing the train of circumstances which have contributed to form a character, in some respects it may be singular and whimsical, yet affording I trust something to imitate, though more to warn and pity."[23]

Hays was only nineteen or twenty when she wrote this, but she was already willing to see the instructive nature of her already-formed character. She was to use this warning convention throughout her writings, as if she lacked the confidence to support the positive depictions she was, in fact, producing. As we shall see there is, indeed, 'something to imitate', at least in a philosophical sense, despite her avowals to the contrary.

I think it is significant, in terms of her later preoccupation with tracing the circumstances which 'helped to form' her mind (Letter 18), that Hays's personal experience seems to collude with this fashionable cult, an apparent concurrence which was to give added weight to her dependence on experience as a mode of analyzing and testing out the philosophies she sought to adopt. It is helpful then to assess the significance to her way of thinking which early influences had on her.

In a letter to Godwin in October 1795 Hays began to articulate just how important she felt influences from her past to be for her present happiness:

> My mind and constitution, some years since, received a shock, the effects of which I suspect I shall never wholly recover. Naturally (if you will allow of the unphilosophical expression, for I cannot at present recollect one more appropriate [sic]) susceptible of strong impressions, a peculiar train of circumstances called these feelings into exercise, and privacy and retirement fixed the fatal, connected chain. (Letter 11)

In this letter Hays is offering a clear indication that she saw her past experience in terms of what philosophy had 'proved' to be for her a 'fatal, connected chain', and that what might have been considered by others as normal, everyday incidents, were to be transformed into part of her systematic philosophy of life. The 'shock' Hays referred to is the death of John Eccles, just weeks before their intended marriage. It was a sad occasion for her as for anyone but, more importantly, it was to become for Hays one more link in the chain of events which was to form her future. Not only did Eccles' death 'cut her off forever from the normal course of womanhood',[24] it seemed to suggest to her that her life was already circumscribed for her.

She had already received a first 'shock' on the death of her father when she was quite young. At nineteen she transformed this experience of loss into a generalized assertion that

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23 *Love-Letters*, pp. 13-14. According to the Pforzheimer Library the journal has not survived.

24 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 53.

'disappointment is the lot of mortals' (*Love-Letters,* p. 35). Significantly, she demonstrated her readiness for dramatic self-projection, this time as someone 'young, but not unacquainted with misfortune' who had experienced:

> the loss of a parent, the best, the most indulgent of fathers: Oh! Mr. Eccles, I cannot tell you half his worth. If perfection could dwell with human nature, it was in him. His soul was an emanation of the divinity; he possessed every heroic sentiment, every tender sensibility, and unbounded benevolence, a universal charity; he was pious without affectation; the gentleman as well as the christian; the tenderest of husbands; the most pleasing, the most faithful of friends; think then, what must be our loss; - but the subject is so affecting, I cannot proceed... . (*Love-Letters,* p. 36)[25]

At a crucial moment in her developing life she lost not only a father but also a father-figure, and she spent many years searching for such a replacement in future mentors, whose role also tended to assume that of 'philosopher-lover's, first of all with John Eccles, various Dissenting churchmen, then William Frend and later William Godwin.[26] Such mentors provided women like Hays a mode of entry into the circles and the education to which they aspired but from which, by nature of their gender, they were largely excluded, although Dissent had already begun this process for them by providing willing educators in the form of some of its influential ministers. The want of a supportive father or guardian is a recurrent motif in Hays's writings.

The fatherless Mary and motherless John Eccles became lovers, largely through an almost daily but secret correspondence, their families objecting to the match on grounds of Eccles's lack of prospects. After many harrowing appeals and partings the parents agreed to the wedding but a few weeks before this was to take place John Eccles died of fever.[27] The situation would fit very well into a sentimental novel of blighted hopes. The idea of a transformation of her grief into literary terms is evident in the concluding poem to *Love-Letters* which celebrates 'the anniversary of that fatal day':

> For which I mourn, and will forever mourn!
> Nor will I change these black and dismal robes!
> Nor ever dry these swoll'n and wat'ry eyes;
> Or ever taste content and peace of heart,
> Whilst I have life, and thought of thee, my Eccles. (*Love-Letters,* p. 219)

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25 A later letter claims 'In my papa was everything exemplified - "the best of husbands, fathers, friends" - and ah! the most beloved! pardon the overflowings of filial affection'. See *Love-Letters,* p. 146.

26 The term philosopher-lover is particularly suited to Hays's relationships with men as it was to Wollstonecraft's. See *Godwin and Mary: Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Ralph H. Wardle (London: Constable, 1967), p. 6.

27 See *Love-Letters*, pp. 1-4. According to Wedd, Hays had begun to write '"Edwin", a dreary tale with Eccles for hero, which was never finished'. See *Love-Letters,* p. 4. However, Hays's *Letters and Essays* contains 'Letter VIII' featuring a 'lover (whom I shall call Edwin)' whose death caused his wife the 'ill-fated Henrietta' to indulge in 'a luxury of tender melancholy'. See Hays, *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (London: Knott, 1793), pp. 110-11. John Eccles was buried 26 August 1780.

Significantly, in view of the way she tended to project her life in terms of drama, she wrote an account of her studied reaction to 'the dreadful news' of his death:

> Wild, distracted, and outrageous, I accused providence, and my Creator! I stamped on the earth in an agony of despair, and made the house echo with my cries; at last my spirits were exhausted, and I sunk into insensibility and stupidity; for three days refused all refreshment - I shed no tears - my senses were confused - my head seemed disordered - I talked calmly but very incoherently - my eyes were fixed, and I scarcely changed my position. (*Love-Letters,* p. 209)

The young Mary, or as Eccles called her 'my dear Polly', claimed 'I always felt a presentiment that I should not be happy!' (*Love-Letters,* p. 200), and addressed hope as 'thou dear deluding sorceress' (*Love-Letters,* p. 201). The hope of the success of her plans only served to reinforce the fear of their annihilation through that most sentimental of motifs, the death of the beloved. Her exclamations appear histrionic: 'My God: what a reverse is my fate! Instead of those scenes of social and domestic bliss which my imagination had pictured to itself, I am involved in misery - left desolate in a world which cannot afford me one satisfying idea!' (*Love-Letters,* p. 204). The author later methodized her claim that her 'existence depends on his' (*Love-Letters,* p. 199) and attempted to find a philosophical justification for this position, as well as for her belief that it was his death 'which blasted all the fond hopes of my youth!' (*Love-Letters,* p. 219). As Jane Spencer points out, 'female polemics were on the whole more concerned with arguments for intellectual equality and support for female education than with revision of the prevailing view of love and marriage'.[28] We shall see the importance of these marriage prospects when I discuss *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* but it is essential to an understanding of Hays's thinking to grasp, not only that 'women saw marriage as their only condoned vocation',[29] but also that for Hays to have such an opportunity snatched away was, in retrospect, to provide confirmation that she was caught within the bind of philosophical causation.[30] Even at this stage of her development Hays was eager to proclaim that 'I glory in my attachment, for it is truth and virtue that am enamoured with'. (*Love-Letters,* p. 150). Whatever her personal inclinations she was conceding a need to objectify her desires in a way suggestive of her later methodical treatment of them.

After the death of Eccles, Hays threw herself into her grief in the manner characteristic of a heroine of a novel of sensibility, wearing 'mourning for my beloved', because 'tis the dress most suited to the sadness of my mind! Gaiety and vanity I have for ever done with' (*Love-Letters,* p. 207), and competing with his sister over their grief: 'alas! your loss is

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28 Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 111.

29 Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: 100 good women writers before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora, 1986), p. 264.

30 See chapter three.

not to be compared with mine; mine is irreparable, unspeakable! he was the friend of my heart; the best beloved of my soul! all my happiness - all my pleasures - and every opening prospect are buried with him!' (*Love-Letters*, p. 204). So Hays not only conceived this loss in immediate emotional terms, she also connected it with subsequent events in her life which encouraged her to believe that she was caught in a 'fatal mechanism', from which there was no escape (Letter 16). Later calamities reinforced this belief which Hays had located within the philosophy she had adopted: that of Helvetius. Her espousal of a philosophy of an extreme materialism which is based on necessity must presuppose and accommodate the presence of a chain, but Hays was to interpret this chain in its most fettering capacity. This study will show the extent to which her philosophical beliefs shaped her life so that she found herself forced to perceive 'how impotent is mere reasoning against reiterated feeling!' (Letter 11). Later Hays was forced to evaluate these reactions from the perspective both of the demise of sensibility and a desire to form one of the radical circle surrounding William Godwin, a new, uncompromising and even threatening position which made her re-evaluate her past and admit that as a very young woman she had 'set out in life upon very wrong principles' (Letter 11), and confess to being 'a victim to high wrought, romantic feeling - [...] to those feelings which made me hunt torture, and cherish despair' (Letter 28).

Before the death of her 'monitor'-lover she read avidly, having 'an early passion for novels and romances' (Letter 11) probably, like Emma Courtney, joining the local circulating library and certainly having access to 'Mamma' Collier's library (*Love-Letters*, p. 199). She told Godwin that 'a variety of circumstances have tended to [awaken] in my mind an inexpressible ardor for the acquisition of knowledge, an ardor approaching the limits of pain' (Letter 4), and it is probable that the sketch she provides of Wollstonecraft's education is indicative of her own: 'like the majority of her sex, her studies were desultory and her attainments casual, pursued with little method, under the direction of her taste, or as her feelings took the lead'.[31]

However, the main aim of this study is to show how philosophy, in particular the philosophical discourses of Helvetius and Godwin, was central to Hays's life and writings. Gina Luria develops this argument up to a point, especially in relation to Hays's non-fictional writings, but does not show how philosophy informed her novels as an active ingredient. Critics have tended to concur with the assessment that:

> The mainspring of her activity [...] was not philosophic. What we see in Emma [of *Memoirs*] - what Mary Hays intermittently saw in herself - is the passionate temperament that seizes on the precepts of philosophy and forces them to subserve its own desires. [...] When she turned to philosophy, she

31 'Mary Wollstonecraft' in *The Annual Necrology for 1797-8; including, also, Various Articles of Neglected Biography* (London: Phillips, 1800) pp. 411-60 (p. 460).

> selected instinctively those precepts that would sanction the spontaneous habits of her temperament.[32]

I shall show that this is an inappropriate evaluation, especially in view of her correspondence with Godwin, and that philosophy systematically informed her daily experience and also her writings.[33]

Hays wished to contribute to the general progress of reform as 'a disciple of truth' (Letter 1), and yet her experience taught her that to adopt Godwin's extreme rationalism was to deny the utilization of a large part of human nature: the feelings. In order to retain her philosophical soundness therefore, she needed to locate the feelings within radical reform, and by so doing legitimate her felt experience. In Helvetius she finds the means to achieve this contribution. The Helvetian philosophy's fondness for paradox makes it far less uncompromising than Godwin's too cerebral approach, and, therefore, it is more accessible to someone unsure of her position within an unfriendly discourse. In Helvetius Hays discovers a favourable 'renunciation of rationalism and an embracing of empiricism' which was the method which 'would bring about that progress of the mind which metaphysics impeded'.[34] Hays found in Helvetius a system which would maintain her philosophical soundness whilst simultaneously enabling her to compromise the rational system of Godwin.

Part of the attraction of the Helvetian philosophy lies in its suggestion that everything is potentially successful. This, combined with its insistence on environmental influence, elevated 'potential' into an apologetics for failure because its emphasis is on attempt and not success, the latter being dependent on circumstances which, Hays argued, were detrimental to female success. I will argue that, in Helvetius, Hays found the means to interrogate and methodize the basis of failure and turn this into a means of success and that, at the same time, she was able to demonstrate that these liberating qualities of Helvetian thinking, which were admired by the radicals, could be paradoxically crippling, especially to women. As in other deterministic philosophies, the key is held both to control and to lack of it. I will argue that this very dichotomy is what attracted Hays to Helvetius, and that her espousal of it is conditioned by this paradox.

Although I shall be focusing on Hays's systematic and intellectual engagement with these two philosophies it is also essential to see that this engagement directly informed her daily existence as well as having a direct influence on her writings. My argument is that it is necessary to see how she used philosophy in an enabling way to liberate herself from the restrictions her daily life was imposing on her. At the same time she used its discourse as a way of entering a more fulfilling and liberating sphere than was readily available to her.

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32 J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Polite Marriage: Eighteenth-Century Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 172.

33 ibid., p. 151.

34 Mordecai Grossman, *The Philosophy of Helvetius with special emphasis on the educational implications of sensationalism* (New York City: Columbia University, 1926), p. 19.

The correspondence with Godwin reveals how her life decisions were reached after philosophical deliberations were carefully made and there is evidence that she made considered attempts to live by her philosophy. For instance, in Letter 11, she tells Godwin that she had decided to move from her mother's home not simply because of a 'satisfaction in the idea of being free' but also in order to rid herself of associative habits or 'certain fatal, connected, trains of thinking' which were preventing her from experiencing this freedom. When she bemoaned her unfulfilled desires for love and domesticity she was expressing her recognition that a fatal chain made it unlikely that such fulfilment would ever be achieved, (see Letter 22). Certainly, if *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* is a reliable reconstruction of Hays's own relationship with William Frend then it would seem that this was conducted almost entirely within a philosophical framework based on radical principles of 'utility' and of contribution to 'general good' (see especially Letter 21). This situation will be fully explored in chapter four but it is helpful to recognize here how far the relationship was founded on principle rather than desire.

The relationship with Frend began after Hays's first publication *Cursory Remarks on An Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship*[35] when Frend wrote to Hays or 'Eusebia', as she called herself, admiring the author's 'freedom of candor' (see *Love-Letters*, pp. 224-25), and continued until January 1796 when Hays referred to an 'irrevocable blow' having 'struck' (Letter 18) but, as chapter four will show, it was not simply that Hays's amorous desires had been thwarted. Frend's rejection was seen as an impediment to Hays's own contribution to the 'general good' she sought to increase. Her philosophical engagement with radicalism made Frend's rejection of her aggravate her recognition of the limited circumstances for improvement which were available to women. This recognition she tried to force on Godwin who, Hays's letters suggest, was responding with inappropriate and unhelpful Godwinian advice during this life crisis.[36] Similarly, when Coleridge wrote that 'poor Miss Hayes is "still sighing for the domestic state"' and that 'she makes a very black story out of it', he is misjudging the extent of her commitment to extending domesticity into radicalism.[37]

Much has been written about this relationship which was immediately recognized as having formed the basis of Hays's novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*,[38] but, if Henry Crabb Robinson (who perhaps knew Hays more than anyone during her latter years) is to be believed, the affection was reciprocal and it was financial pressures which led to Frend's rejection of Hays.[39] Hays claimed in Letter 20 that 'it is not on the altars of love but of

35 (London: Knott, 1792).

36 See especially Letters 20, 22, 23.

37 Letter from Coleridge to J.J. Morgan, 1 February, 1808 in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* ed. by E.L. Griggs, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) III, p. 50.

38 See especially Frida Knight, *University Rebel: The Life of William Frend (1757-1841)* (London: Gollancz, 1971) although she confuses the fictional Augustus Harley with Hays's first lover, John Eccles.

39 Crabb Robinson refers to Frend's profession of 'an attachment, but he wanted the means of supporting a wife, he said'. See *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. by Edith Morley (London: Dent,

gold that men now come to pay their offerings' and that consequently Frend had 'had some struggles to ice his heart and stifle his humanity'. This is why it is essential to read Hays's novels within their philosophical context: otherwise they become merely further examples of love-interest narratives.

Little is known of her next relationship with Charles Lloyd, although the outcome

1938), p. 235. William Frend did not marry until he was 51, marrying Sara Blackstone in 1808 despite, according to Coleridge, having been 'under a sort of positive engagement to Miss Hayes for a great number of years' (Griggs, p. 50).

became notorious in London circles.[40] Apparently Lloyd alleged that Hays had 'offered herself to him, in the manner of Emma Courtney',[41] which suggests the almost total identification of Hays with her heroine in people's minds and the ease with which this identification provided a vehicle for abuse of the author. Robert Southey gives an account of the denouement of their 'affair' in a letter to his wife in which he claims that Lloyd's written 'apology' to Hays stated that 'her principles were so very bad that he had suspected her conduct'.[42] However, the whole episode is ambiguous and I think only of interest to demonstrate the potency of Hays's heroines' affront to contemporary morals and the usefulness of this affront for denigrating Hays. I think it is sufficient to see that it too helped cement her feelings of being trapped within a 'magic circle' of female restraint which her philosophical beliefs did nothing to relieve.[43] Whilst this preoccupation with Hays's life is understandable, given her own emphasis on her circumstances and her translation of these into her fiction, it does obscure much of the writing itself so that, although the central position of philosophy may be acknowledged by some critics, it is almost wholly misjudged, and her challenge to Godwin's thinking overlooked or underestimated.

However, as well as this direct, personal intrusion of philosophy into her life, in her writings we see Hays becoming more systematic in her approach to it so that she may be seen to struggle with its epistemological problems and uncertainties. This attempt to grapple with its often paradoxical demands is what turned her optimistic adoption of it as a liberating life-force into an awareness of it as cementing the very imprisonment from which it had seemed to promise to free her. Helvetius had substantiated female inferiority on the grounds of environment so that Hays could find a philosophically legitimate means of excusing this position. At the same time, his thinking could give Hays the confidence to glory in the difference she had experienced as a Dissenter but, as importantly, as a woman.

When Hays began her correspondence with Godwin in October 1794, then, she considered herself to be a 'disciple' of Helvetius (Letter 23), but, despite, or perhaps because of, this identification she eagerly began her pursuit of a new, more personal opening into philosophical enquiry, one which might have suggested to her that it would be as enabling to women as that of Helvetius and as Dissent had been. Her early correspondence with William Godwin, the whole of which forms Appendix One of this

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40 For accounts of this relationship see Luria, 'Mary Hays' chapter 7, and the following correspondence: Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, 8 February 1800 and 13 February 1800 in *The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb* ed. by E.V. Lucas, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1935), I, pp. 170-75; Robert Southey to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 January 1800 and Robert Southey to Edith Southey, 15 May 1799 in *New Letters of Robert Southey* ed. by Kenneth Curry 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), I, pp. 187-88 and I, p. 215.

41 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 12.

42 Letter from Robert Southey to Edith Southey, 15 May 1799, in Curry, I, pp. 187-189 (p. 188).

43 *Memoirs*, I, p. 54.

study, shows her eager to grapple not only with the terms but with the implications of his discourse.

Hays's relationship with Godwin began after the publication of the first edition of his *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice And its Influence On Modern Morals and Happiness* which, in her anxiety to read it, prompted her to write to Godwin requesting the loan of a copy (See Letter 1). This was the beginning of a largely one-sided correspondence until June 1796, although it would appear to have continued until at least 1800 despite the fact that Letters 39-45 show that their relationship faltered seriously immediately after the death of Wollstonecraft in September 1797. What began as adulation on Hays's part ended, according to Godwin, in coercion and 'tyranny' (see Letters 41 and 42). Whatever the reason (and Godwin twice refers to Hays's charges of 'impropriety' against him. See Letters 41 and 44), Godwin locates much of the breach in literary rivalry: 'we are, at present, twin stars, that cannot shine in the same hemisphere. Hays cannot admit of an equal, nor Godwin, in this case, of a superior' (Letter 41). In the previous letter Godwin admitted that 'I have been less pleased with you, since you became in your own opinion, a considerable author, and a power "not altogether insignificant"'. Perhaps his next line best reveals the source of his real dissatisfaction: 'To speak plainly, I think you have lost a little of that simplicity and mildness, which so well becomes a woman as a human creation' (Letter 38). I shall argue that it was largely because Godwin neglected the place of 'sexual distinctions', on whose inequalities Hays's arguments about women's position were founded, that his philosophy became for Hays yet one more obstacle or prejudice to overcome. The apparent liberation of his progressive doctrine was to become transformed into obstruction so that instead of adopting it she found herself needing to contradict it. Noticeably, it is her earlier belief in Helvetian thinking which provided her with the means and the confidence to make such a confrontation.

Through Godwin Hays was able to extend her circle of acquaintances notably to include Thomas Holcroft, of whom she was in awe (see Letters 14 and 15), Elizabeth Inchbald (see Letter 29) and Amelia Anderson (see Letter 32), but it was Hays's connection with Mary Wollstonecraft (to whom she re-introduced Godwin in January 1796) which was very close and enriching for Hays. It began after Hays had written in praise of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a copy of which had been given to Hays by George Dyer (*Love-Letters*, p. 5). Hays regarded Wollstonecraft as possessing 'the sort of genius which calls the one to ten million' and Hays knew that she was allying herself to a social outsider and consequently courting similar criticism to that made of her friend.

In her obituary of Wollstonecraft Hays eulogized her as:

> this extraordinary woman, no less distinguished by admirable talents and a masculine tone of understanding, than by active humanity, exquisite sensibility,

> and endearing qualities of heart, commanding the respect, and winning the affections of all who were favoured with her friendship and confidence.[44]

The obituary was unsigned and, as if desirous of proclaiming herself as a Wollstonecraftian, Hays wrote in the October issue, claiming authorship 'as a public testimony of respect and affection for my late admirable friend',[45] as if this public expression of solidarity would help provide the 'voice' she was searching for. In her entry for the *Annual Necrology 1797-1798*, in which Hays also seized an opportunity to put forward a forceful defence of 'an able champion',[46] Hays seemed to assume that their philosophical positions had the same foundation in thinking which we shall find is based on Helvetius:

> Persons of the finest and most exquisite genius have probably the greatest sensibility, consequently the strongest passions, by the fervor of which they are too often betrayed into error. Vigorous minds are with difficulty restrained within the trammels of authority; a spirit of enterprise, a passion for experiment, a liberal curiosity, urges them to quit beaten paths, to explore untried ways, to burst the fetters of prescription, and to acquire wisdom by an individual experience.[47]

This reads as a vindication of Hays's own position and an Helvetian apologetics for difference, and in many respects Hays might have been formulating her own obituary as the two women's personal careers are remarkably similar:

> Had the sensibility of this extraordinary woman early found its proper objects, softened by the sympathies, and occupied by the duties of a wife and mother, she had serenely pursued her course. The placid stream, that gliding through the meadows, fertilizes their banks, checked in its course, becomes a destructive torrent: those strong passions, that, ravaging the mind, afflict and deform society, have their origin in opposition and constraint; if in this way talent is sometimes generated, it seems to be purchased too dear.[48]

We shall see how closely these terms echo Helvetian thinking and that the phrases used are very reminiscent of those articulated by Hays in her letters to Godwin and by her heroine Emma Courtney.

Hays benefitted greatly from this relationship: not only did she find a friend and ally but she also found a critic, adviser and literary contact. As early as the writing of *Letters and Essays* in 1793, Wollstonecraft wrote a critical letter objecting to Hays's humility as an authoress. As Hays appears later to have heeded her advice Wollstonecraft's letter is worth examining in full:

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44 *Monthly Magazine*, 4 (1797), pp. 232-33.
45 ibid., p. 245.
46 *The Annual Necrology for 1797-8*; pp. 411-60 (p. 459).
47 ibid., p. 411.
48 ibid., p. 454.

> You must be aware, Madam, that the *honour* of publishing, the phrase on which you have laid a stress, is the cant of both trade and sex: for if really equality should ever take place in society, the man who is employed and gives a just equivalent for the money he receives will not behave with the obsequiousness of a servant.
> I am now going to treat you with still greater frankness - I do not approve of your preface - and I will tell you why. If your work should deserve attention it is a blur on the very face of it. - Disadvantages of education etc ought, in my opinion, never to be pleaded (with the public) in excuse for defects of any importance, because if the writer has not sufficient strength of mind to overcome the common difficulties which lie in his way, nature seems to command him, with a very audible voice, to leave the task of instructing others to those who can. This kind of vain humility has ever disgusted me - [...] The last paragraph I particularly object to, it is so full of vanity. [...] An author, especially a woman, should be cautious lest she hastily swallows the crude praise which partial friend and polite acquaintance bestow thoughtlessly when the applicating eye looks for them. In short, it requires great resolution to try rather to be useful than to please. With this remark in your head I must beg you to pardon any freedom whilst you consider the purpose of what I am going to add. - Rest on yourself - if your essays have merit they will stand alone, if not the *shouldering up* of Dr. this or that will not long keep them from falling to the ground. [...] Indeed the preface, and even your pamphlet, is too full of yourself. - Inquiries ought to be made before they are answered; and till a work strongly interests the public true modesty should keep the author in the background - for it is only about the character and life of a *good* author that anxiety is active - A blossom is but a blossom. 20 November 1792. (*Love-Letters*, p. 225)

The published Preface to *Letters and Essays* is distinctly non-apologetic, Hays declaring that the inadequacy of female education 'is the only apology I shall make to the critical reader' (pp. v-vi).

Although she might not have been aware of it, in Wollstonecraft Hays also had a defender against the criticism of Godwin. Wollstonecraft reiterated one of Hays's constant rejoinders that he was unable to step outside his own understanding: 'You judge not in your own case as in that of another. You give a softer name to folly and immorality when it flatters - yes, I must say it - your vanity, than to mistaken passion when it was extended to another - you termed Miss Hay's [sic] conduct insanity when only her happiness was involved - I cannot forget the strength of your expressions.'[49] Certainly, public scorn helped to unite these women and Wollstonecraft's early death left Hays to carry the weight of both anti-Jacobin and of misogynist criticism.

However, this relationship also had drawbacks for Hays as her self-identification as a Wollstonecraftian procured her a share of the opprobrium surrounding this 'Goddess of

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49 Wardle, *Godwin and Mary*, p. 111.

Reason'[50] and helped construct one of the 'myths'[51] surrounding Hays which consequently encouraged a distorted response to her and certainly towards her writings. Crabb Robinson speaks of Hays having 'in her day [...] a sort of popularity, that is with those who could tolerate a warm friend of Mrs. Wollstonecraft'.[52] He also claims that she 'professed all her [Wollstonecraft's] opinions with more zeal than discretion',[53] a criticism levelled at her in her adoption of Godwin's principles also.[54] William Beloe thought that Hays had 'really, when first known, appeared lively, ingenious, innocent, and interesting' but had become corrupted by Wollstonecraft, Helvetius and Rousseau.[55] The notes to Richard Polwhele's 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798) situates Hays as 'little known' but 'evidently a Wollstonecraftian' in the assurance that this label would be read as denigrating Hays through the relationship.[56] A position which Hays might have anticipated as offering her sisterly and authoritative protection was to obscure understanding of the serious intentions of her writings.

Throughout her life Hays, like so many women, suffered from being evaluated by nature of her sex, a difference whose significance she attempted to force Godwin to acknowledge because it implied inferiority.[57] Although Hays also acknowledged female inferiority, her writings consistently challenged its naturalness and inevitability. The 'voices' she had adopted enabled her to find the means to make this challenge. It is surely ironic that whilst Hays's writings were expressing a desire to find a voice through which to articulate her concerns, these writings were in actual fact providing that voice and her substantial literary career is a testimony not only to her successful bid for freedom but also to her ability to find self-expression.

Where relevant to my argument Hays's publications have been examined more fully and reference made to them in the appropriate chapters of this study. The following provides an overall indication of the range of Hays's writings within the context of the 'voices' available to her and shows how from her first publication to the end of her career she was experimenting with a variety of genres which would support her attempts to explore her own situation and, more generally, to draw attention to the inferior position of women.

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50 See Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* 3 vols (London: Robinson, 1800), where Wollstonecraft figures as such a Goddess.

51 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 26.

52 Morley, p. 629.

53 ibid., p. 5.

54 See anti-Jacobin novels such as Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* and Charles Lloyd's *Edmund Oliver*, 2 vols (London: Cottle, 1798).

55 *The Sexagenarian; or the Reflections of a Literary Life* (London: Rivington, 1817), p. 362.

56 'The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature' (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798; repr. New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), p. 20.

57 For instance, Robert Southey wrote to Coleridge, 23 December 1799, that Hays 'is a woman whom I respect - she is worth seeing. For with all her mistaken notions, she has genius, more than most of the lady writers'. See Curry, I, p. 210.

Hays's literary career began with the publication of *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public Worship* (1792). This was her contribution to what was recognised as the 'Wakefieldian controversy', within the Dissenting church.[58] However, she had already had pieces accepted and published by the *Universal Magazine* and in *Harrison's Collection of British Poetry*.[59] In 1793 she published *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* with the encouragement of her Dissenting friend Rev. Hugh Worthington.[60] Two years later at the beginning of November 1795 Godwin suggested 'a plan' to Hays of writing down her experiences in fictional form, to which she agreed under his supervision (see Letter 12), and these sheets subsequently became her first novel *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* published in 1796.[61] Her second novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*, was published in 1799.[62] These two novels will form the basis of my study of her writings, where I attempt to show that it is essential to appreciate the extent to which Hays, as authoress, was influenced by the terms of Helvetian and Godwinian thinking, and that both novels may only be fully understood within the context of both philosophies.

An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women published anonymously in 1798, has been subsequently attributed to Hays.[63] The authoress claims to have written it 'some years ago' when the subject had 'some degree of novelty to recommend it' with the purpose 'of advancing and defending the pretensions of women, to a superior degree of consideration in society, to that which they at present enjoy'.[64] She asserts 'that I come not in the garb of an Amazon [...] but rather in the humble attire of a petitioner [...]. Not as a fury flinging the torch of discord and revenge amongst the daughters of Eve; but as a friend and companion bearing a little taper to lead them to the paths of truth, of virtue, and

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58 *Letters and Essays*, p. 1. For fuller discussion see chapter two.

59 See *Letters and Essays*, p. x, and pp. 94-5 where she notes that she had written 'some observations' on Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werther* which 'were inserted by a friend in the Universal Magazine, with my name affixed to them. A little time after, I found them to my great surprise (with some additions) at the conclusion of a new edition of the work, without being marked as a quotation, or any acknowledgement being made from whence they were taken'. I have been unable to trace either the *Universal Magazine* entry or the edition of the novel referred to.

60 It would appear that Mary Wollstonecraft tried to interest her own publisher, Joseph Johnson, in the book although it was eventually published by Knott. See *Love-Letters*, pp. 224-25.

61 2 vols (London: Robinson, 1796). Subsequently referred to as *Memoirs*.

62 2 vols (London: Johnson, 1799). Subsequently referred to as *Victim*.

63 (London: Johnson, 1798; repr. New York: Garland Publishing, 1974). I shall refer to this edition throughout the thesis. William Thompson speaks of continuing the work started by Wollstonecraft and Hays whose "*Appeal*" was addressed to 'the then closed ears of unreasoning men'. See *Appeal of one Half the Human Race, WOMEN, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, MEN, To Retain Them in Political, and Thence in CIVIL AND DOMESTIC SLAVERY* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825; repr. Cork: Hyland, 1975), p. vii. Gary Kelly has recently questioned this attribution, suggesting that *Appeal* may have been written by Eliza Hays. See *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 113. I do not find the claim sufficiently convincing and a letter dated 21 February 1820 states 'I was surprized to learn that yr sister had commenced authoress [... although] I have not been able to procure her book' which suggests that she was not already known as an author despite her contributions to *Letters and Essays*. Letter from A. Smyth to Hays, 21 February 1820. Pforzheimer Collection.

64 Advertisment, n.p.

of liberty' (pp. v-vi). Typical chapter titles are 'What Women Are', 'What Women Ought To Be', 'What Men Would Have Women To Be'. She claims that a second essay is 'at the service of the public if this meets with its approbation' (p. 295),[65] and concludes that if men:

> but endeavour to make women happy - not by flattering their follies and absurdities - but by every reasonable means; and above all by considering them as rational beings upon a footing with themselves, - influenced by the same passions, - and having the same claims to all the rights of humanity; which, indeed, are so simple, that justice well defined includes the whole

then women 'will at last be, what all wise, and good men wish them, and what in reality they may ---- and OUGHT TO BE' (p. 293). *The Appeal* focuses on important gender and philosophical issues which will be returned to in the chapter on *The Victim of Prejudice.*

In 1803 Hays published *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries* containing over 288 celebratory entries of female achievement.[66] This was commissioned by Richard Phillips and 'is the work by which Mary Hays continued to be known during the nineteenth century',[67] although the *Monthly Review* wished that 'the vicious and defective traits of several females, who make a figure in this work, [had been] more shaded from the view'.[68] In the nineteenth century the models of femininity so decried by Hays were obviously still influential.

Hays's 'Life of Charlotte Smith' was similarly commissioned by Richard Phillips for his *Public Characters of 1800-1801*.[69] In the entry itself Hays gets to the heart of her own problematic position as a woman writer where even praise could not escape the categories of gender:

> The penalties and discouragements attending the profession of an author fall upon women with a double weight; to the curiousity [sic] of the idle and the envy of the malicious, their sex affords a peculiar incitement: arraigned, not merely as writers, but as women, their characters, their conduct, even their personal endowments become the subjects of severe inquisition [...] wanton malice, in the failure of facts, amply supplies defamation, while from the anguish of wounded delicacy, the gratification of demons seems to be extracted. (pp. 61-2)

Her next publication *Harry Clinton; or, a Tale of Youth*[70] is a rewriting of Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1766-72), 'from which celebrated production the materials

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65 This appears not to have materialized.

66 6 vols (London: Phillips, 1802).

67 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 13.

68 *Monthly Review; or Literary Journal* 43 (1804), pp. 92-3 (p.93).

69 (London: Phillips, 1801), pp. 43-65. Letters from John Aikin reveal that this was a controversial contribution because Hays exceeded the word limit and, consequently, there is a dispute about payment. See Letters from John Aikin to Hays, 27 September 1803 - 14 January 1805. Pforzheimer Collection.

70 (London: Johnson, 1804).

of the present tale are selected, and presented to youth, as exhibiting a history of the practical education and culture of the heart'.[71] It was 'presented' to Henry Hays Dunkin by 'his affectionate aunt'.[72] *Historical Dialogues for Young Persons* followed in 1806,[73] being 'presented to the Youth of My Family, with a view to whose instruction and entertainment they were originally written'.[74] It contains the same named characters as in *Memoirs* and *Victim*, being Mrs Neville, Mary, William, Emma and Henry. The *Monthly Review* considered it 'a valuable work for juvenile understanding'.[75]

Hays's politics and feminism appear to have softened somewhat so that *The Brothers* (1815) was considered suitable to be published by Hannah More's evangelical publishing company.[76] This was followed by *Family Annals; or, The Sisters* in 1817, in which Hays pays a debt to Maria Edgeworth, 'a revolutionary in works of imagination'.[77] In the contrasting situations of the generous Ellen and the vain Charlotte, Hays maintained that, 'Passions are the winds only by which the bark of life is wafted; it is the helm of reason that must safely direct its course' (p. 10), a consideration which Hays spent most of her life contesting.

Her last recorded work is the commissioned *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrated and Celebrated* published in 1821,[78] written 'in the cause, and for the honour and advantage, of my sex'.[79] She added optimistically that 'the powers and capacity of woman for rational and moral advancement are, at this day, no longer a question', although the 'education of woman is yet directed only towards the embellishment of the transient season of youth' (p. vi-vii). In her sixties she was still seizing the opportunity to aver woman's inferiority as being based on sexual distinctions:

> I maintain, and, [...] ever will maintain that there is, there can be, but *one moral standard of excellence for mankind,* whether male or female, and that the licentious distinctions made by the domineering party, in the spirit of tyranny, selfishness, and sensuality, are at the foundation of the heaviest evils that have afflicted, degraded, and corrupted society: and I found my argument upon nature, equity, philosophy, and the Christian religion. (p. vi)[80]

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71 Advertisement, (n.p.).
72 Dedication, (n.p).
73 (London: Johnson, 1806).
74 n.p.
75 *Monthly Review*, 58 (1809), pp. 432-33 (p. 432).
76 *The Brothers; or Consequences. A Story of what happens every day, addressed to that most useful Part of the Community, the labouring Poor* (London: Button and Son, 1815). The *Monthly Review* considered that 'the work is likely to be useful, its aim being to show the imprudence of those marriages among the labouring classes, in which the lover is attracted rather by showy than by sterling qualities, and in which no provision has been made for future or contingent expenses'. (*Monthly Review*, 80, 1817, II, p. 323).
77 (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1817), Preface, n.p.
78 (London: Allman, 1821).
79 Preface, p. v.
80 See also chapter five of this study.

But it was not only her position as a novelist which gave her an opportunity to confront assumptions, her role as a literary reviewer similarly proved enabling to her life of challenge, whilst also helping her to gain her financial independence (see Letter 11).[81] After the publication of *Memoirs* Hays became regarded as an authority on the novel although she had already begun reviewing for the *Critical Review* in 1795.[82] I have conducted a survey of reviews contained in the 'Monthly Catalogue' section of the *Critical Review* during 1795 and 1797 and, although unsigned, many are suggestive of Hays's known style. Attribution of this sort of material is always problematic but internal evidence in the form of repeated phrases and the introduction of Hays's known preoccupations is very persuasive. Moreover, the significance of attributing them to Hays, for this study, is that they show the extent to which she might have been considered an authority on the novel and, moreover, they demonstrate a committed engagement with philosophy's direct relationship with the novel. I have selected only examples which demonstrate this commitment.[83] For instance, the May issue contains a review of *Susanna; or, Traits of a Modern Miss* in which the reviewer moves away from the novel being reviewed to claim that:

> Could we rob the youthful mind of its gay mistakes, and substitute, for the ardour of warm feelings and the glowing illusions of fancy, a correct knowledge of 'things are they are' - we might rather, perhaps, retard than accelerate that reformation, the probability of which philosophy, in the present day, has endeavoured, not unsuccessfully, to demonstrate.[84]

On the same pages a review of *Castle Zittaw* concludes that virtue and 'her chaste and fair attendant pleasure' often leads 'through rugged paths, and must be cherished for her own sake: the pleasure she confers is altogether internal, and consists in a self-acquitting conscience, - which, however it may meliorate, will by no means shield from the casualties, the vexatious cares and disappointments of life' echoing an attitude to virtue and experience which Hays's heroines demonstrate in her novels.

I would argue that the review of *Secresy; or, the Ruin on the Rock* by Hays's friend Eliza Fenwick is also by Hays,[85] not only because of its references to her friend Dr

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81 Although, according to Dr Tompkins, a reviewer's 'pay was not high; two to two and a half guineas a sheet was the usual rate, and on this scale it would take a goodly batch of novels to fetch a crown'. See *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 17.

82 Apparently on the recommendation of George Dyer. See *Love-Letters*, p. 8. Cheryl Turner, *Living By the Pen: Women Writers in the eighteenth century* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 118, refers to Hays contributing to the *Monthly Review* but I have found no evidence of this. Hays is not listed as a contributor in Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review First Series 1749-1789. Indexes of Contributors and Articles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934) or *The Monthly Review Second Series 1790-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

83 See the bibliography for a wider range of possible reviews.

84 *Critical Review*, 14 (1795), pp. 113-14 (p. 113). The reference to Godwin's novel in the *Susanna* review, which is characterisitic of Hays's writing, suggests to me that this is, indeed, by Hays.

85 ibid., pp. 349-51.

Priestley,[86] and to Holcroft's *Anna St Ives*, but especially because of the emphasis on the novel's tendency to 'recommend in all circumstances, and upon every occasion, open, intrepid, unequivocal sincerity, and to exemplify the vice, and consequent mischief, of every species of disguise and concealment'. We shall see that several of these terms are employed in Hays's own novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, whereas the following extract from the review directly relates to the situation of Hays's heroine in that novel:

> There is little doubt but that many of the mistakes, and of course the miseries of society, which perhaps all originate in mistake, might have been prevented, or ameliorated, by the substitution of truth and frankness, for the tinsel of affected, heartless complaisance, the varnish of half civilization. [...] it would be well for the virtue and for the happiness of the rising generation, if they could be trained up without the knowledge of, or the temptation to, these refined prevarications. (p. 349)

The Contrast provides an opportunity for the reviewer to justify 'works of fiction' on the grounds that 'they may also prove instructive, when delineating the principles of the human mind, and exemplifying its progress' and refers to the uncertainty of the fallen heroine's 'reformation' which 'as philosophers acquainted with the force of habits, we conceive to be attended with much difficulty'.[87] In the same 'Monthly Catalogue' of the *Critical Review* the reviewer of *The Unfortunate Attachment* claims that 'Novel writers, in general, seem not aware, that though sensibility adds grace and interest to virtue, it may degenerate into weakness. Magnanimity and fortitude are becoming in both sexes, and are expected, more especially, from that which is complimented with being the strongest'[88] which is suggestive of Hays's concern about gendered education and consequent expectations of behaviour.

During the period 1795 to 1797 a series of reviews occurs which introduce Helvetian ideas which were central to Hays's philosophical outlook and which are fully explored in chapter three. The reviewer of *Audley Fortescue; or the Victim of Frailty* invites 'writers of fancy' to 'aim at moving the passions' because 'they are the springs of activity, and the energies without which nothing good or great can be effected' but, referring to the novel's depiction of 'a false and a pernicious morality' s/he continues, 'let them be moved in the cause of truth, and not called in, as auxiliaries, to prolong the dominion of infatuation and wickedness'.[89] The review of *The Creole; or, the Haunted Island* becomes the vehicle for discussion of the psychological as well as technical qualities of the novelist:[90]

> To write a good novel (perhaps one of the most arduous and delicate of literary labours) requires a knowledge of the human mind, its propensities and

86 See chapter two of this study.
87 *Critical Review*, n.s. 13 (1795), pp. 345-46.
88 ibid., p. 346.
89 *Critical Review*, n.s. 16 (1796), pp. 115-16.
90 *Critical Review*, n.s. 19 (1797), pp. 225-26.

> passions, - an extensive acquaintance with, or an accurate observation on, men and manners, - penetration to discern, acuteness to catch, sensibility to feel, judgement to discriminate, taste to select, and imagination to paint, not merely the varieties, but the most interesting features, of the human character.

Whilst Hays was not unique in linking the novel with an understanding of human nature, the concluding emphasis on Dr Johnson's maxim '"That to attempt much is always laudable"' which becomes expanded into: 'If it does not induce us to despair, perhaps we can never set our models too high: - nothing great will ever be performed while we content ourselves with merely aiming at mediocrity' leads me to believe that the reviewer is Hays. Similarly, two other reviews echo sentiments which Hays conveys in her writings and in her correspondence with Godwin. The reviewer of *The Observant Pedestrian; or, Traits of the Heart: in a Solitary Tour from Caernarvon to London* reminds the reader that 'virtue and intellect are nearly connected:- principles must, in a great measure, be the result of reflection',[91] whilst the review of *Count St Blancard, or the Prejudiced Judge* insists that 'so imperfect is the nature of man, that the best principles are liable to degenerate into fanaticism',[92] and that of *The Sorcerer* extols its 'useful moral' about 'the danger of indulging a strong, that is, a solitary and concentrated passion' because 'it is like the pouring out of water that suddenly swells into a resistless torrent'.[93] The October 1796 review of *Joan!!!* desires greater emphasis on motivation as 'events in real life would, when related, gain credit with difficulty, without great attention to the minute connecting circumstances, and to the springs of motives of action'.[94] Both of these latter reviews contain ideas which are founded in the Helvetian centrality of the passions. But it is the review of *The House of Tynian* which reiterates a concern which Hays was articulating throughout her writing career. After praising the author, George Walker, for his 'discrimination and knowledge of the human heart, in the delineation of character' the reviewer argues that:

> Sexual qualities probably originate more in education than in nature; circumstances generate peculiar tendencies; and those circumstances have hitherto, generally speaking, rendered the affections of women more pure, stable, and individual, than those of men.[95]

Chapter three will clarify why I am claiming Hays as author of these particular reviews as it is an important part of my argument that Hays was actively engaged with philosophical issues in all areas of her daily life.

It has been easier to attribute reviews to Hays in the *Analytical Review* because of a letter from Mary Wollstonecraft referring to Hays reviewing Jane West's *A Gossip's Story*

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91 *Critical Review*, n.s. 15 (1796), p. 341.
92 ibid., p. 342.
93 *Critical Review*, n.s. 17 (1796), p. 113.
94 *Critical Review*, n.s. 18 (1796), p. 236.
95 ibid.

for Johnson the co-founder of the *Analytical*.[96] The review appeared in the January 1797 issue under the signature "V.V."[97] but so many of the phrases are a direct echo of Wollstonecraft's own assessment of the novel that I think it can be assumed that Hays was the reviewer.[98] Reviews by "V.V." are *Santa-Maria: or, The Mysterious Pregnancy*,[99] *The Inquisition*,[100] *Estelle*,[101] *Calaf; a Persian Tale*,[102] and *The Castle on the Rock; or, Memoirs of the Elderland Family*.[103] Two unsigned reviews of Eliza Hamilton's *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah*,[104] and George Walker's *Theodore Cyphon; or, the Benevolent Jew*,[105] may be traced to Hays.[106]

It is noticeable that reviews for the *Analytical Review* are less grounded in philosophical thinking than those of the *Critical Review* which may reflect the approach of the proprietors although *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* enabled Hays to declare that 'candid and calm discussion, not abuse, is the proper method of making *rational* converts'.[107] Wollstonecraft was gently critical of her reviewing style in that she claims that:

> you seem to run into an error which I have laboured to cure in myself: you allude to things in the work which can only be understood by those who have read it, instead of, by a short summary of the contents, or an account of the incident on which the interest turns, enabling a person to have a clear idea of a book, which they have never heard of before.[108]

Details of Hays's later life continued to provide evidence of her consistent commitment to the principles of progress but her longevity revealed a dissatisfaction with her earlier radical ideals.[109] However, I do not see this so much as a reaction to political events which failed to implement these ideals as a continued and less sanguine expression of dissatisfaction with radical thinking itself. The Godwinian philosophy had failed her in her quest for an enabling voice appropriate for articulating concerns which were the daily

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96 See Letter 47. The *Analytical Review* ran from 1788 to 1798.

97 Claire Tomalin has pointed out that reviews in this journal 'were anonymous or signed with initials only, usually not the initials of the writer but some arbitrarily chosen ones such as "Y.Y."'. See *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 94.

98 See *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 25-6.

99 *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), p. 524.

100 *Analytical Review*, 26 (1797), pp. 77-8.

101 *Analytical Review*, 27 (1798), p. 203.

102 *Analytical Review*, 27 (1798), p. 296.

103 *Analytical Review*, 27 (1798), pp. 418-19.

104 *Analytical Review*, 24 (1796), pp. 429-31.

105 *Analytical Review*, 23 (1796), pp. 600-1.

106 See Letters 32, 34, 36, 37, 46.

107 *Analytical Review*, 24 (1796), p. 431.

108 This advice seems to have been taken, as it accompanied a review copy of Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) which was reviewed by Hays in the *Analytical Review* January 1797 without the flaws referred to by Wollstonecraft. See *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 25-6, and Letter 47.

109 For a full account of Hays's later years see Luria, 'Mary Hays' chapter nine; Morley, especially pp. 124, 130-31, 212, 234, 629; *Love-Letters*, pp. 12-13.

experience of women. A letter from an acquaintance Penelope Pennington, with whom Hays boarded at Hot Wells, Bristol, in the mid-1810s, shows that Hays's early experience was still uppermost in her mind and that she still found the expression of it central to her present situation.[110] Pennington clearly made a ready identification with Hays's unhappy circumstances to the extent that, after reading Hays's own 'history' she traced 'so much of my own, that I am half inclined to think I am reading of myself, with only a slight transposition of facts'. She adds 'Alas! is it not the sad abstract of ninety-nine women's lives out of a hundred, who have any character, or feeling at all?'. Hays, therefore, does appear to be articulating a wider female concern which makes her position as a writer even more dynamic.

One of her last surviving friends and supporters was Henry Crabb Robinson, who not only provides most of the information about her latter years but is also able to offer a perspective on her life and concerns. He referred to her as 'a very zealous political and moral reformer', a stance which 'brought her into disrepute with the rigid' so that 'her character suffered - but most undeservedly'. He considered that 'whatever her principles may have been, her conduct was always perfectly correct'.[111] His Journal entry of 1819 gives a fuller account of her influence and changed outlook on life:

> She was one of the minor *litterati* of that generation, now forgotten. She was free in her opinions and incurred reproach because she avowed her friendship for Mrs. Wollstonecraft, who was really a woman of superior mind. Miss Hays had only the faculty of easy writing. She was perfectly correct in her conduct and of a kind disposition. She was upright and benevolent. She made herself disagreeable in company by preaching. She was a moral pedant, but no scholar. She professed Unitarianism, and her connections lay among Unitarians. [...] Formerly she was wearisome to her friends by her complaining tone of conversation.... Now I find from my journal that she was become more cheerful and agreeable in company, being less sentimental.[112]

This assessment pinpoints the main preoccupations of Hays throughout her life: freedom of expression, benevolence, religious toleration, dissatisfaction, but fails to suggest that the concerns which made her 'disagreeable' and 'wearisome' evolved out of the philosophical foundation of her life. In 1802 Hays had written to Henry Crabb Robinson that her solitude had 'become more profound' due to a sense that she had been 'insulted and ill-used by the public', but this public would have been misunderstanding her principles both in her personal life and in her writings.[113]

It is surely ironic that a woman who believed 'what a wretched farce is life' (Letter 18) should live to be eighty four, having outlived many of the persons who were perhaps best

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110 Letter from Penelope Pennington to Hays, 28 December 1813. Pforzheimer Collection.
111 Morley, p. 5.
112 ibid., p. 235.
113 Letter from Hays to Crabb Robinson, 27 February 1802. Dr Williams's Library.

able to make this 'wretchedness' bearable.[114] In March 1842 Hays had written to Henry Crabb Robinson that if he did not see her soon he would have to seek her remains 'in a humble grave in the Newington cemetery with the simple memorial Mary Hays engraved on the headstone'.[115]

Hays lived through a period of flux and excitement and her writings chart this ebullience. It is perhaps surprising that, even at the moment of her nadir, we find her desperately clinging to the optimism she had personally to refute by making a public declaration in 1800 that, despite Wollstonecraft's death, through which women had lost a leader, 'the spirit of reform is silently pursuing its course. Who can mark its limits?'.[116] In 1821 she was still able to write optimistically that:

> we live in an age of great events, vicissitudes, and innovations: the invention of printing, the consequent diffusion of literature and extension of education, necessarily lead to a new order of things: it is in the nature, and of the essence, of man and mind to be active and progressive: *much* is to be feared; *more* perhaps to be hoped. Knowledge, virtue, happiness, are inseparably connected: wisdom must be the *mean*, moral improvement the *end*. All beside is but folly.[117]

Unfortunately, Hays was never able to see philosophy as an intellectual game and had always failed to 'look at the world with all its awkward things, its clumsy, lumpish forms, its fools, its cockscombs, and its scoundrels with more endurance' despite George Dyer's early advice.[118]

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114 Godwin had died 7 April 1836, Eliza Fenwick in 1840, William Frend and George Dyer in 1841.

115 Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, March, 1842. Dr Williams's Library. According to the burial records Hays died 22 February 1843. I have located her gravestone in Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington. The gravestone bears the name Mary Hays and her dates followed by the name of her brother John Hays and his dates. Both sets of dates are heavily obscured at the time of writing although plans are in hand for the stone to be cleaned.

116 *Annual Necrology*, p. 459.

117 *Memoirs of Queens*, pp. vii-viii.

118 See opening quotation to this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONAL DISSENT AND AN EDUCATION FOR INDEPENDENCE.

> Short as the narration you give of yourself is, it is a miniature portrait of a lady in danger and distress, the work of an exquisite artist calculated to touch the heart. Happy for you and your friends it is an historical portrait of what was.[1]

The appeal of Dissent for someone trying to break out of a traditional mould, as apparently 'natural' as that of gender, is quite clear when we consider the latter's construction within received ideas which have been formulated as innate, and Dissent's preoccupation with the riddance of such, to the extent that '"Whatever has been established is bad"'.[2] If Dissent liberates the individual from the limitations imposed on her by constructed ideas, such as are inherent in orthodox religion, this, coupled with its corollary, the autonomy of the individual, and that individual's unique experience, would make it attractive to the Radicals, many of whom were avowed Dissenters.[3]

Although the individual's concern with his or her unique experience is present in many forms of religion, 'Unitarians [...] have accorded rather more respect to the notion of personal autonomy than most others'.[4] Its emphasis on experience, which it saw as the only legitimate basis for faith, reasserted the individual's preoccupation with self above God, and the self's 'natural' concern with daily experience: 'it has preached the value and enjoyment of this life and this world rather than the next'.[5] Education through experience offers an implicit liberation to a group who were denied access to more formally constructed forms of knowledge, precisely because it is incontrovertible, and so it lends itself to increased confidence in one's own ability to examine and interpret reality, albeit ostensibly a religious reality:

> A man's religious beliefs are largely immune to denial, [and] his interpretation of existence cannot be denied or disproved by anyone else, within wide limits at least, because what is important is how things make sense to him; that they do not make sense in the same way to another is theoretically irrelevant, showing only that the other man is a different type of person with a different experience of life.[6]

This Dissenting attitude is particularly attractive for marginalized groups whose experience is not necessarily recognized as socially important. Thus, its attractive concentration on difference would appeal to persons who experienced life through difference, as women did and do. Janet Todd claims not surprisingly that 'Dissent

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1 Letter from Robert Robinson to Hays, 11 January 1783. Dr Williams's Library.

2 Quoted in Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 159.

3 For example William Godwin attended Hoxton Academy 1773-78, and Thomas Holcroft's *Hugh Trevor* has been called 'a Dissenter's self-examination and English Jacobin description of "things as they are" all rolled into one'. See Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 152.

4 John Hostler, *Unitarianism* (London: Hibbert Trust, 1981), p. 69.

5 ibid., p. 64

6 ibid., p. 67

nurtured many radical women during these final years of the century'.[7] Just as Dissent exalts experience, then individual recognition of this might become the key to self-worth, as asserted by that individual's experience itself. As a writer on the influence of Dissent points out:

> People are very obviously different from each other, the differences between them at birth often being accentuated by later differences in upbringing and situation. Because of this their spiritual needs and aspirations are not all the same, still less their experience of life, and in consequence they are bound to have different religious convictions. [...] Therefore everyone is in a specially privileged position, potentially able to discern truths which are not visible to others; each man's view of the divine is unique, a particular revelation granted to him alone.[8]

Such relativity of response added 'a mark of interrogation against all that was accepted as axiomatic and authoritative by contemporaries'.[9]

Now, the individual woman could gain confidence in the knowledge that she was accountable only to God, and this important accountability was to be mediated through individual conscience alone. The female individual could find succour within social requirements. A consequent self-confidence could arise out of Dissent's democratic doctrines and its spiritual egalitarianism. Once equal before God it becomes easier to be equal before man, especially as this entailed a belief in the independence so craved by women like Hays. Moreover, Dissent gave an opportunity for expressing this independence. Hence, Gina Luria considers that it was a combination of Hays's personality and her religious training which encouraged a concern with her own identity and search for self-fulfilment which was unusual for eighteenth-century women.[10]

As we have seen, Dissent is a strong incentive to individualism, and Hays certainly thrived on this atmosphere of freedom, equality and debate. Her correspondence with leading Dissenting members reveals that she not only attended church meetings but she was also active in debate with her minister friends, being unafraid to implement the unitarian principle of contradiction or 'divergence of opinion', and using their correspondence as a vehicle to discuss matters such as materialism and the death of Christ.[11] Dissent offered Hays an opportunity to engage in radical and stimulating issues which were at odds with the accomplishments propounded by conduct-books, and were, in fact, antipathetical to the female requisites of these which were designed largely to deny such pretensions.[12]

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7 *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 196.

8 Hostler, p. 69.

9 Anthony Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800* (New York: Octagon, 1971), p. 12.

10 See Luria, 'Mary Hays', chapter two, 'Mary Hays as Child of the Augustan Age'.

11 See especially letters from Hugh Worthington, 15 November 1791; 17 January 1794; and from John Disney, 7 February 1793, Dr Williams's Library.

12 See chapter five.

A parallel attraction of Dissent was that it inevitably both ensured, and made respectable, 'outsider' status 'for what was a Dissenter but someone who rejected the Church with which the state identified itself, who believed instead in freedom of conscience and opinion, freedom from political interference and control?'[13] Consequently, its exponents might be thought to court punishment, if not martyrdom, as a Dissenting faith inevitably encapsulated a radical position through exclusion. The Test and Corporation Acts (an extension of the Test Act of 1673, which was not repealed until 1828-9) effectively excluded Dissenters from participation in public life. The believer might be said to court trouble because 'not only are there certain specific matters in which a man must reply solely according to his conscience; but a man must also follow the directions of his conscience; must step out boldly no matter whither he be led'.[14]

Dissent not only preached independence, but also offered an opportunity to express this through the voluntary exclusion necessitated on adoption. At the same time, it allowed differences to be accounted for environmentally and educationally, and the differences which had hitherto made women unable to enjoy the rational status of men, could, thus, have their 'natural' basis removed, making them 'social and modifiable'.[15] Dissent sanctioned difference as a legitimate inroad into discussion of <u>any</u> form of experience. Simultaneously, it does not seem a very big step from a perception of one's unique experience of the divine, to one's unique experience of anything. If the unitarian merely 'has to search his heart and mind to discover the truths he knows most surely, framing his beliefs and building up his own religion' then he may surely utilize his heart for the discovery of non-religious truths, and as 'the responsibility for doing this unavoidably rests on him alone', he is in a unique position to discover the truths which inform this experience.[16] As we shall see in chapter three, Helvetius sanctioned difference by seeming to elevate it into an indicator of worth via 'genius', vaguely suggesting that difference <u>is</u> genius.

Such emphasis on the individual has not surprisingly led Dissent's concern with religious freedom to be seen to cross over to embrace political freedom also, and the terms 'radical' and 'Dissenter' were used in a similar way as 'Jacobin', to denote a general political disapproval. Anthony Lincoln calls Dissenters 'by far the most politically minded people of their times, in that they daily encountered obstacles which could only be justified or condemned in political terms'.[17] According to Cragg:

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13 Locke, p. 18.

14 Lincoln, p. 11. See also Mark Philp's 'Godwin and Rational Dissent' in *Godwin's Political Justice*, pp. 15-37

15 Ruth Watts, 'The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education 1790-1850', *History of Education*, 9 (1980), 273-86 (p 275). In my discussion of the influence of Dissent on the position of women I am indebted to Ruth Watts whose work provides an authoritative account of the topic. To distinguish this article from Watts' thesis the full title of the article will be given throughout.

16 Hostler, p. 70.

17 Lincoln, p 17

> it was among the nonconformists that the cult of liberty, both in theology and in politics, found fullest scope. [...] Changes in thought came easily in chapels which were loosely organized and where the demand for greater freedom was an honoured tradition. The dissenting academies encouraged new studies and were the forcing ground of new developments in many fields.[18]

Their Dissenting Academies have been considered 'centres of democratic politics', where 'the principles of constitutional government, the liberty of the subject, the rights of resistance, and the liberty of the press found a place in the curriculum'.[19] It was this very open-endedness of the Dissenting Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (November 4 1789) which was to occasion Burke to claim in 1790 that 'it is not for the propagation of his own opinions, but of any opinions. It is not for the diffusion of truth, but for the spreading of contradiction. Let the noble teachers but dissent, it is no matter from whom or from what'.[20] According to William Hazlitt, a Dissenter 'speaks his mind bluntly and honestly; [...Dissenters] are depositories of a principle as sacred as, and somewhat rarer than, a devotion to Court influence --- we mean, the love of truth'.[21] Dissent, then, provided an atmosphere of debate, freedom of thought and expression, but fundamental to this freedom was its basis in the same philosophical beliefs which Hays was to find so comforting in Helvetius. Hays saw her engagement with Helvetius very much in this same spirit of enquiry, as her opening paragraphs to 'Defence of Helvetius' show:

> Discussion and controversy, when managed with temper, have ever appeared to me, not only a favourable method of exercising the ingenuity and sharpening the faculties of the disputants, but likewise, of promoting a spirit of liberal curiosity and enquiry.
>
> The sincere disciple after *truth* should take nothing for granted, nor hold any thing as sacred; but should (if I may be allowed the strong expression) be *licentious* in his investigations. *Error,* the result of the independent researches of the unfettered individual, in its nature variable, is short-lived, and, by the contradiction it involves, frequently affords the clue of truth: while *prejudice,* opinions taken upon trust from others, is usually fierce, obstinate, and intolerant.[22]

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18 Gerald R Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 171.

19 H. McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts: Being the History of the Non-Conformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), p. 39. Subsequent references are to McLachlan, *English Education*. Elsewhere McLachlan claims that Joseph Priestley had as his 'object in all his teaching [...] to induce the students to examine and decide questions for themselves uninfluenced by the opinions of others'. See H. McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1943; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), p. 56. Subsequent references are to McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*.

20 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 95

21 Quoted in Routley, pp. 180-1.

22 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 26-8 (p. 26).

DISSENT AND SENSATIONALISM

As a corollary to its insistence on religious toleration, Dissent was concerned with a psychological system which could provide the means to procure this toleration, mainly through its wholehearted adoption of David Hartley's insistence on sensationalism and the association of ideas.[23] Like Helvetius, Hartley believed in the power of environmental influence over moral behaviour. The laws of association could be beneficial in encouraging the individual to 'learn to cherish and improve' good affections and passions whilst s/he learns to 'check and root out such as are mischievous and immoral'.[24] Again, like Helvetius, he saw man 'as a creature of his social environment, but the latter could be changed'. [25] Women were now presented with a means to be forgiven for the subservient position to which they had been trained.

Joseph Priestley, perhaps the greatest of Unitarians, saw that Hartley's law of association pointed to a corresponding importance of education which could be extended to accommodate women. The acquisition of knowledge would lead to the eradication of error which was anathema to the radicals such as Godwin. These errors could be accounted for by both Helvetius, and by Dissent via Hartley, who also shared in the optimism of belief of man's perfectibility. In fact, the relationship between Hartleian philosophy and Unitarianism was so close that 'acceptance of the former was often a prime factor in leading to conversion to the latter'.[26] Priestley went a stage further than Hartley accepting 'extreme necessarianism' and 'a chain of cause and effect' traceable back to its first cause: God.[27] Priestley found the conclusions arising out of this and its corollary, the law of associations 'exhilarating' as, consequently, 'all people were shown to be capable of virtue'.[28] Hays was also, at first, to find such a proposition exhilarating, moreso because she quickly saw how its implications had to take in not only female virtue but also female circumstances in general. Once the power of impressions has been accepted then a consequent obligation to expose each individual to as many of these as possible might become a prerogative. Women were to be included within this associative framework.[29] Unitarians, therefore, 'held a much higher conception of womanhood than that which was generally prevalent at this time',[30] and 'certainly in the case of middle

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23 For a fuller discussion of the influence of Hartley on leading members of Dissent see Ruth Watts, 'The unitarian contribution to education in England from the late eighteenth century to 1853' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1987) chapter two. Further references to this will be made as Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution'.

24 David Hartley, *Observations on Man*. Quoted in Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution', p. 48.

25 Watts, 'The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education, 1790-1850', p. 274.

26 Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution', p 65

27 ibid., p. 48

28 ibid., p. 49.

29 ibid., p 71. Unitarianism 'held that a full development of the intellectual faculties was vital for a corresponding development of the moral character and of true religion', this was 'therefore, a *sine qua non* for both sexes'. See Watts, 'Knowledge is Power - Unitarians, gender and education in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Gender and Education*, 1, No. 1 (1989), 35-50 (p. 35).

30 ibid.

class girls and women Priestley advocated far higher education than was usual'.[31] Thus, women found in Dissent's psychological equality a means to greater respect and independence. At the same time that women were being included as educative individuals their own ideas gained strength from the beliefs of Rational Dissent:

> Their rejection of both original sin and the essential depravity of man - the blame for which was usually shifted onto woman's shoulders - gave them a fresh, more generous view of the humanity and possible perfection of all.[32]

The levelling aspect of the acquisition of knowledge had, then, to spread to encompass women, whom it was felt were also privileged in the reception of sense impressions. Thus religion could be seen as socially, as well as spiritually, liberating, as women were to be taken seriously in a sphere which could not fail to have implications for every other aspect of life which enhanced educational prospects inevitably opened up. Dissent per se insisted on a change of attitude to women far removed from the dominant one because Dissenters', 'rational theology, progressive educational ideology and general willingness to examine afresh traditional social assumptions enabled them to develop and to pioneer liberal views on women's status, education and role in society'.[33] Watts sees this as a 'revolutionary contribution from Radical Dissent'.[34] She points out that although 'the moral influence of womankind, or at least the "respectable" portion of it, was not a new concept in Christendom, [...] the belief that morality was a rational matter for which a good intellectual education was necessary, was new'.[35]

An important possible influence on Hays's novel *The Victim of Prejudice* was the Unitarian objection to the usual contemporary assumption that female virtue was formed through social restraint. They preferred a 'solid and substantial education' for women to help them be self-reliant, independent, accountable for their own actions and able to form their own opinions'.[36] This is a position Hays's heroines systematically adopt, and one which Hays uses to confront Godwin with the inadequacy of the radical position regarding women.

It was this opening up of the female position that Hays embraced as a corollary to her parallel concern with Helvetian philosophy. She was also likely to be hearing such an attractive possibility at the chapels she attended.

THE FEMALE ROLE IN DISSENT

Dissent's leading spokesman in the late eighteenth century, Joseph Priestley, also believed that women, having been educated to fulfil their roles as wife and mother, could

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31 Watts. 'Joseph Priestley and Education'. *Enlightenment and Dissent*. No. 2 (1983). 83-100 (p. 88).
32 Watts. 'Unitarian Contribution'. p 71.
33 Watts. 'Radical Dissent and the Emancipation of Women 1780-1860'. *Faith and Freedom. A Journal of Progressive Religion*. 38. pt. 2. no 113. (1985). 71-82 (p. 71).
34 ibid., p.73.
35 ibid.
36 ibid.

continue the education process through their influence within these roles;[37] a position which Hays later developed in regard to the opportunities open to women radicals, and one which would accentuate her suffering at being unwed and childless. Women were given an enabling role both for their own self-enhancement as they were to be provided with the means 'to maintain themselves respectably',[38] and one which would encourage them to perceive themselves as making a necessary contribution to the progress of Rational Dissent. Among those offered a similar education to that for sons were Anna Laetitia Aikin;[39] the daughters of Gilbert Wakefield;[40] and Sophia, the daughter of William Frend, who was 'taught, first, reading and writing, later Hebrew and philosophy, and introduced to all his famous friends'.[41] As Watts points out, 'the desire to teach the young of both sexes to understand Rational Dissent and thus perpetuate it was a further assault on female ignorance',[42] and such a liberating attitude to education itself was sufficient to encourage the confidence to seek changes in the presumptions surrounding the restrictions on education relating to females. Paul Hunter makes the point that, regarding the neglect of women's education, 'the most insistent words came from Dissenters who felt strongest about access to the Bible for all and who therefore emphasized the necessity of reading' for women as well as men.[43] Similarly, its emphasis on works as well as faith offered an opportunity for activity otherwise denied to women. Faith is invisible, works are not. Duties become a way of expressing this faith and one such, as we have seen, lay in the pursuit of improvement and self-interest, which had now been made obligatory for all, including the educative potential mother.

As we can see, Dissent was to offer a more formally 'useful' or shaping role to women superimposed upon their traditional, 'natural' one. Women could find themselves part of the shaping atmosphere of radicalism via the route of Dissent. This identification had to embrace women who were attracted to its spirit of independence but who were similarly condemnatory of their own fondness for such a subversive role. Women were ideologically reluctant to admit to any formal learning and even Lady Mary Wortley Montague advised against acknowledging the extent of education received.[44] This demonstrates the potency of the teaching of the conduct-book, a staple ingredient of which was the depiction of 'deviant' or 'monstrous' women who sought such self-fulfilment.[45]

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37 See Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and Education', p. 89, and Watts, 'Radical Dissent and the Emancipation of Women 1780-1860', p. 74.

38 Watts, 'Joseph Priestley and Education', p. 89.

39 See McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, p. 87.

40 See Watts, 'The Unitarian Contribution to the Development of Female Education, 1790-1850', p. 277.

41 See Knight, *University Rebel*, p. 243.

42 Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution', p. 71.

43 J Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (London: Norton, 1990), p 269.

44 See McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, pp. 28-9.

45 See chapter five for discussion of the enfeebling nature of conduct-books.

THE 'MENTOR' SYSTEM OF FEMALE EDUCATION

However, whilst Dissent opened up thinking in a way particularly conducive to women, it still debarred them from sharing in its formal education, as its Academies were set up to provide an education which was 'comprehensive and liberal, and adapted to youth in general, whether they are intended for civil and commercial life, or for any one of the learned professions', which would automatically exclude women.[46] However, they were encouraged to attend the Academies' open-air sermons and the Non-conformist church services, and there is evidence of individual women enjoying the liberal atmosphere of the Dissenting Academies themselves.[47]

But a significant divergence from this formal education from which women were excluded took the form of a 'mentor' system by which female demands for education are both acknowledged and, in part, supplied, albeit by acceptance of a superior male role. Because women were denied the educational opportunities open to men, those with pretensions to education largely contented themselves with receiving education at second hand, through the benefit of 'mentors' or 'monitors'. Emulation held the key to education and, we find women like Hays eagerly seeking to digest what was an accepted bastion of male education, notably Latin.[48] The youthful Hays very playfully foregrounds her engagement with this male preserve: 'Vanity! - don't you know I have a *quantum sufficit*? - I shall be a latin scholar in time, I verily believe, - will you undertake to teach me? I am sure I should improve with such a master; are you not very much obliged to me for the compliment? You are, I know, so I need not ask' (*Love-Letters*, p. 77). Such flirtatiousness seems to confirm the correctness of Jane Spencer's term for these men as 'love-mentors',[49] and Hays's correspondence with Godwin also suggests such a relationship, and supports Gary Kelly's claim that 'for these women [Inchbald, Alderson, Robinson, Hays and Wollstonecraft] Godwin was more than a Mentor or a father-figure, more one might say, than a mere man' although Hays does seem to cast him in the role of father-figure (Letter 32).[50]

Hays's own father died whilst she was a young girl but she testified to his suitability in this position of monitor and her fiction seems to suggest not only his appropriateness for this but also her sense of the loss of such an influence. To fill this educative role, Hays eagerly sought the guidance of her male acquaintances, becoming firstly a willing pupil to John Eccles, later to her Non-conformist friends, such as Hugh Worthington,

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46 McLachlan, *English Education*, p. 246. See also chapter two of Watts,'Unitarian Contribution' for a fuller account of dissenting education.

47 For instance at Warrington 'the wives of the Tutors, by their education, experience, accomplishments and family connections, were well equipped every way to act as hostesses, and contributed not a little to the social life of the Academy'. See McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, p. 85.

48 According to Ruth Watts, 'Classics, the basis of a "gentleman's" education was banned for a girl in case they harmed her purity of mind'. See 'Unitarian Contribution', p. 43.

49 *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p. 145.

50 *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 266.

John Disney and Robert Robinson, and later still to William Godwin, describing herself to the latter as his 'pupil' (Letter 32). Godwin suggested she regard him as her 'genius in the moon' (Letter 7). Later, in the early nineteenth century, Hays's brother-in-law John Dunkin seems to have fulfilled this role to some extent,[51] although Hays was now a literary figure and he acknowledged her authority regarding philosophical and literary topics.

Hays may well have cast the Dissenting William Frend in this role of mentor by eagerly responding to his 'questions which I beg leave to suggest to your consideration'.[52] Although Frend's replies to Hays have not survived, it is clear from the conclusion to Letter 20 that they were engaged in an extensive and probably educative correspondence, similar to that held with Godwin, although not as one-sided as that one was.

Acknowledging the blurred distinction between man as lover and man as educator, the young Hays had wished to Eccles that 'the lover must not be forgot in the monitor' and that despite the special claims of the former 'I will look up to you as my guardian and adviser, as a tender friend, and regard you with a sisterly affection' (*Love-Letters*, p. 30). Hays so frequently refers to this lover in terms of sibling regard as almost to reject the expressed passion between them. Their letters are often more appropriate to a scholarly relationship, Eccles subscribing himself 'Your most affectionate Brother, and tenderest of friends' (*Love-Letters*, p. 53) and Hays asking him to 'look on me as your sister, as your faithful friend' (*Love-Letters*, p. 30). Their 'unaffected passion' was different to that of others because it was based on sincere communication which makes reserve an affront, a stance she later explores and confronts in her first novel:

> Whatever I know, you shall know; and (with what delight do I speak it!) I am certain you will never betray my unreservedness. I am happy to think I have met one to whom I can speak with freedom; this seldom happens between two of different sexes; but as I have no secrets, nor ever shall have, which you need blush to know, our friendship will be supported with a delicacy which (I fancy) is rarely found between two of the same sex. In these latter friendships it often happens, that a too great freedom shuts out delicacy, and presently the friend sinks to the level of an indifferent person, and sometimes lower [...] (*Love-Letters*, p. 54).

So, whilst she had regarded Eccles as her 'monitor' and provider of the education lacking for herself she was basing this instruction on a sincerity which is dependent on mutual respect, ostensibly unimpeded by considerations of sexual interest. When their meetings were interrrupted by parental interference Hays responded to his wish for her 'to lay down a plan, how you should employ your leisure hours', and she urged Eccles:

> three evenings in a week I expect you to dedicate to our correspondence; write your thoughts with freedom, just as they flow, I shall never complain of your being tiresome, on the contrary I account the reading of your letters one of the most pleasing amusements of my life! I shall require your sentiments on

51 See correspondence from John Dunkin to Hays, November 1807 - 7 April 1822. Pforzheimer Collection.

52 Letter from William Frend to Hays, 16 April 1792, in *Love-Letters*, p. 222.

> various subjects, occurrences and authors, and hope by a strict attention to your precepts to become more worthy of the tenderness you profess for me.

She continues 'I flatter myself it will not prove an unpleasing task to form the mind of her, with whom you wish to spend your future life' (*Love-Letters*, p. 46).

She seemed to exult in the idea that learning through a male might also be a means to fulfilment other than educational. How much more attractive a monitor/pupil relationship might be that of husband/wife? Not only would it enable Hays to have access to the necessary education but, as we have seen, it would also enable her to participate in Dissent's fulfilling role for women: that of wife and mother. Her desire to sustain a long and, initially acquiescent, pupillage makes her later re-negotiation of this role with Godwin, and then with the fictional Mr Francis and Mr Raymond, more forceful.

One aspect of this master/pupil relationship which stands out is that whereby Hays seems to readily accept her own erroneous behaviour because it provides Godwin with the opportunity and responsibility to point it out to her. In fact he is placed under an obligation to enable her to correct her behaviour and so she is able to prolong their relationship ad infinitum. Letter 12 gives a good example of this manouvering of herself into a subservient position, with its eager recital of a catalogue of personal faults:

> I was thinking, while dressing, after you left me the last time you call'd, how many faults you had discovered in me, and led me to discover in myself, in the course of our short acquaintance. I am almost afraid to enumerate them - Bigottry, obstinacy, selfishness, ambition, indolence, sophistry, presumption, vanity, and inconsistency. I fear lest you should be discouraged from the arduous task of attempting my reformation, for I begin, myself, to suspect that I have more tenacity of temper than I was aware of. But, you will, at least, allow my claims to some share of modesty and ingenuousness when I declare, that so far from being offended by this representation of myself, which you have given me, it has only tended to render me still more desirous of further intercourse with you, and more solicitous of gaining your esteem, the hope of which, notwithstanding the frightful mirror you have held up to me, I do not yet relinquish. I like your sincerity, and, to afford you a still greater proof of my own, I will give you a little farther insight into my character, though it will make yet more against me: but we cannot expect to have our disorders heal'd by the Phycisian [sic] however skilful he may be, while we conceal any of their symptoms. Even my ingenuousness, then, I doubt, has in it a mixture of policy, and my humility is strongly tinctured with pride.

Such a position clearly offers the agent an opportunity for placing the responsibility for the eradication of these 'faults' onto the monitor, and she refers to him as 'my mind's physician' (Letter 16). At the same time it offers a chance to demonstrate the Godwinian 'sincerity' which should unite two rational beings. She begs Godwin to 'continue to be my good genius', claiming his 'assistance and friendship' as someone who has 'already made me wiser and happier' and because 'you will do me good, if any body can' (Letter 15). Hays is clear about how she sees her own position, as she admits that 'I write confessions to you' (Letter 28).

Later in this relationship, as Hays's confidence grows, we see a new self-assertiveness which promises to compromise this pupil/teacher role, as Hays shows dissatisfaction with the advice offered, although she continues to insist on its value in abstract terms. Her letters are good examples of her change in attitude and subsequent challenge to Godwin as adviser. Obviously, she preferred the mentor's role to have strict application to the experience of the pupil. This fitted in with her philosophical elevation of experience which conflicted with the thinking of her particular mentor Godwin.[53] Hays's heroine Emma Courtney goes through a similar process of philosophical courtship, then intermittent rejection of, Mr Francis's advice. As we saw in chapter one, by the end of their relationship Godwin was not prepared to accept her 'charge of tyranny', a term he clarifies as denoting criticism of her which she had earlier taken 'in good part' so that he concludes that 'the alteration is in you and not in me'. Her challenge was so emphatic that he insists that 'intimacy, I am afraid, you have precluded' (Letter 42).

The earlier correspondence between Hays and John Eccles consistently emphasised Hays's wish for self-fulfilment and demonstrates the ease with which Dissent accentuated the individual's preoccupation with the self, a preoccupation which Hays seemed to take for granted within her continuing engagement with religious and philosophical subjects. However, her later correspondence with Hugh Worthington, John Disney, Theophilus Lindsey and Robert Robinson during 1791-1794 reveals Hays as a mature sharer in debate and a woman whose views are not only tolerated but sought, Worthington assuring Hays of his readiness to assist her enquiries 'after truth in general' and concluding that 'I wish all to think for themselves, and esteem the circumstances of making them my Disciples a very small matter compared with them being the Disciples of Goodness'.[54] He compliments her on her Euclid, a significant choice of subject for a female pupil, in that mastery of his propositions suggested mastery of moral ideas also. But Hays was to utilize her knowledge of this subject for a particular reason: to aid her argument that female inferiority (effect) is an inevitable consequence of inadequate education (cause).[55] Hays would depend on Euclid in such a way when discussing the moral implications of cause and effect with Godwin, in the sense that the reduction of morality to mathematical principles was a 'science' which would enable her to understand systematically more clearly her own position, and enable her to express it more scientifically.[56] Priestley also considered the 'sublime studies of mathematics and philosophy' to take precedence over more traditional subjects.[57] That their study by a

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53 See chapter three

54 Letter from Hugh Worthington to Mary and Elizabeth Hays, 15 November 1791. Dr William's Library.

55 See Letter 15

56 See Letter 2, note 1.

57 Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution', p. 61.

woman would be more significant is obvious when compared with the more commonly prescibed pursuits for women.[58]

But, whilst Hays had a hunger for knowledge and guidance she also claimed as a right the imparting of this knowledge to her. Women had been encouraged to regard this pursuit of knowledge from a position of inferiority and Hays clearly felt at a disadvantage in the assessment of her own convictions, finding it difficult to trust her own interpretation without the intercession of another. As Wollstonecraft also pointed out, female education had not equipped women to assess, compare and reason, thus it is not surprising that Hays lamented that 'I have been endeavouring cooly to philosophise' and wished that her mind 'had acquired more strength' (Letter 15). Circumstances, or experience, again undermined her confidence in her own abilities.

If Dissent offered an ideological climate conducive to eighteenth-century women, what actual opportunities had become open to them? Paul Hunter considers that a new importance given to female education, despite its often 'patronizing' rhetoric and 'demeaning' logic, was 'stronger than historians have usually said, and the quality and range of the education recommended for women is somewhat surprising', and that much of the educational advice offered by Dissenters 'involves reading (often in several languages), knowledge of history and geography, and (usually) mathematics'.[59] Most relied on the mediation of 'mentors' or 'monitors' but, as Hays's novels demonstrate, such mediation could form another kind of dependence, so that their abrupt removals only exposed women even more to the vagueries of an experience which had previously been mediated for them. Hays took the thinking of Dissent and explored its application in practical terms through her life and through her writings. Importantly, she used the implications of this practical application, alongside those of Helvetian thinking, to challenge the inadequacies of Godwinian philosophy. We shall see that this challenge, and the analytical trait of Dissenting literature, found expression in Hays's first excursions into literary debate.

It was through this atmosphere of Dissent and its emphasis on free discussion that, as Eusebia, Hays made her initial excursion into written polemic with *Cursory Remarks On an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792),[60] which was her contribution to the 'Wakefieldian controversy',[61] being a reply to Gilbert Wakefield's attack on dissenters and their form of public worship which was written

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58 See Mary Poovey *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapter one and Ellen Pollak *The Poetics of Sexual Myth: Gender and Ideology in the Verse of Swift and Pope* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), chapters one and two.

59 Hunter, p. 270.

60 (London: Knott, 1792).

61 *Letters and Essays*, p. 1.

whilst he was a tutor at Hackney College in 1791.[62] His was a deliberately argumentative publication which objected to the form of worship and the practices adopted by Rational Dissenters which Wakefield argued were mere 'ceremonies' which were 'absurd and contemptible'.[63] He later contentiously identified them as 'anti-christian' and 'opposite to the true spirit of the gospel'.[64] Not surprisingly, the pamphlet caused an uproar in Dissenting circles and it was also answered by John Disney and Anna Laetitia Barbauld,[65] but it was Hays's reply which caught the notice of the critics and the public. It was made firmly in the Dissenting tradition of religious debate in its announcement that 'this is an age of controversy, and all who love truth must rejoice in seeing the spirit of freedom and enquiry universally disseminated; as in such an impartial discussion, where every question is agitated, and every opinion, however respectable from usage, or antiquity, [is] brought to the test', [66] and took up many of the propositions she was later to identify as Helvetian in her *Monthly Magazine* articles, and in her novels; in that it is the power of early associations which helps create the individual and even on this account alone public worship is beneficial. Whilst asserting that 'all religious establishments are irrational, and anti-christian', (p. 16), she claimed the aid of secular philosophy to show the connection between public act and private belief. Public worship was effective precisely because 'the bulk of mankind, engrossed by the inferior concerns of attaining worldly riches, honours, and pleasure, are still in the infancy of knowledge, and incapable of entering into the spirit of a religion entirely spiritual and intellectual' (p. 5).[67] Our mental limitations ensure that such external stimuli are necessary because, as we shall see with the paradoxical situation of Helvetian philosophy, mankind is not yet ready to implement the very factors which will make him/her free to worship unaided so that 'we [...] penetrate to the source of things, and become true philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard' (p. 20). Determinism similarly suggests that we cannot become 'true philosophers' until environmental conditions enable us to become 'true philosophers'.

Here Hays is more concerned with our capacity for error and present compromise than utopian ideals, the inefficacy of the latter being something which the Postscript to *Cursory Remarks* stressed as a 'miserable consolation' (p. 26). But, whilst acknowledging that prayers cannot 'inform God' they do have a beneficial, associative effect even as 'a mechanical devotion, [or] a mere performance' which 'may have a restraining effect upon the conduct' (pp. 10 - 11).

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62 *Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (London: Deighton, 1791).

63 ibid., p. 13.

64 ibid., p. 22

65 John Disney, *A Defence of Public or Social Worship: A Sermon* (London, 1791); Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Remarks on G. Wakefield's Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of public or social worship* (London: Johnson, 1792).

66 *Cursory Remarks*, p. 19. Subsequent references are placed in parenthesis in the text.

67 Similarly, David Hartley's associationism forced Joseph Priestley to believe 'it vital to build up early associations with God's power and providence in the minds of children'. See Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution to Education', p. 58

Ruth Watts points out that 'the use of association to inculcate religious habits and piety' was common 'and this stress supported a wholehearted approval of that bracketing of moral and intellectual development which Priestley had advocated'.[68] Hays supports the influence of early associations on subsequent behaviour because 'when through the medium of the senses, repeated impressions have been made on the brain, good or evil habits acquire an ascendancy not easily to be eradicated' (p. 11). However, her later writings expose the disastrous, causal effects of such a belief as her heroines find themselves trapped within their past lives and their early impressions. Unfortunately, the production of 'prejudice' is a risk involved in associationism and is also underscored by determinism whereby the effects of associations become binding. Mrs Barbauld (also a Unitarian) claimed that 'every association begets a prejudice[...] a very small part only of the opinions of the coolest philosopher are the result of fair reasoning; the rest are formed by education, his temperament, by the age in which he lives, by trains of thought directed to a particular track through some accidental association [...]'.[69] This echoes Helvetian thinking on the power of associative language. It is because 'the world is not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative' that external, sense-based stimuli are necessary to encourage devotion, as 'the majority, by giving up all exterior means of generating devotional affections, would soon cease to give themselves any concern on the subject, and breaking loose from what at present affords a wholesome restraint, become mere profligates or worldlings' (p. 13). Rationality is insufficient to draw out the necessary ingredients for worship which needs to pre-occupy the senses so as to have any convincing effect.

The Postscript to the Second edition (1792) acknowledged a softening in Wakefield's revisions: 'With pleasure I find the new edition less equivocal, and candidly acknowledge the plan of Social Worship there sketched out [...] is granting almost all that can be asked, or is practised by the generality of rational Dissenters'.[70] This revised edition makes reference to the fact that although Wakefield 'thought her not unworthy of serious notice, she could not help feeling a wish that he had not prefaced it by a ludicrous sally unworthy of the subject, and of the writer'.[71]

Her pamphlet was well received,[72] and brought Hays to the attention of an influential range of Dissenters including William Frend, and Theophilus Lindsey.[73] William Frend was particularly keen to meet 'a Lady who entertains the highest esteem for the writings of revelation and examines them with that freedom of candor described by Eusebia in the

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68 Watts, 'Unitarian Contribution to Education', p. 68.

69 Quoted, ibid.

70 *Cursory Remarks*, 2nd edition (London: Knott, 1792), p. 25.

71 ibid., p 23.

72 Although the *English Review* complimented Eusebia 'more in the style of gallantry than polemics'. Quoted in Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 110.

73 The latter thanks Hays for a copy on 15 April 1793. Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to Hays. Dr Williams's Library

first page of her elegant pamphlet' (*Love-Letters*, pp. 220-22). Her 'freedom of candor' was to cause them both much suffering in the following years, this being the first of the many letters exchanged between them, he hoping that 'Eusebia would permit me [...] to number myself among her friends' as an 'unknown though sincere well-wisher'.

Its success encouraged her to enter into contact with a wider circle of Dissenters such as John Disney and Robert Robinson, although Hays had already been engaging in active discussion, as we have seen through her correspondence with some influential Dissenting ministers, and, by the time her next publication was ready, she had gained a substantial (although still apologetic) confidence resulting from her belief that she was contributing to 'truth and virtue':

> It is in the cause of what the writer conceives to be truth and virtue, that she has taken up the pen: every endeavour towards meliorating the human mind - how weak, or imperfect so ever - must be acceptable in the sight of that Being whose nature is pure benevolence, and "no effort will be lost".[74]

God's sanction is important at this stage; in her later writings the pursuit of truth and virtue for political reasons became paramount.

Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous (1793) looks at the morally debilitating effects of education on girls, effects which will make them 'useless' as contributors to radical 'utility'.[75] Hays often shows this by contrasting differently educated girls in a similar way to that utilized by Helvetius when he depicts educative scenarios which *Letters and Essays* faithfully echoes:

> A young girl is brought up by a stupid and bigoted mother. This girl can understand by the word Virtue nothing but the exactitude with which the nuns fast, and recite their prayers. [...] Another daughter is brought up, on the contrary, by judicious and patriotic parents, who never give her any examples as virtuous but such as are useful to our country [...] this girl will necessarily have ideas very different from the other.[76]

Citing Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, as her inspiration, she claimed to have 'endeavoured to rescue the female mind from those prejudices, by which it has been systematically weakened, and which have been the canker of genuine virtue; for purity of heart can only be the result of knowledge and reflection' (p. vi).[77] Anxious that principles instead of rules for behaviour should be inculcated she hoped that:

> if by seeing some common truths placed in an interesting point of view, any young minds should be incited to mental, or moral improvement, the end for

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74 *Letters and Essays*, p. ix.

75 'Utility' is a key term in the Godwinian vocabulary and is discussed in chapter three where Hays foregrounds its relationship with female independence.

76 *A Treatise On Man, His Intellectual Faculties and his Education*, trans. by W. Hooper, 2 vols (London: Law and Robinson, 1777) I, pp. 195-200 (p. 197). Burton Pollin claims that this is the edition familiar to hays. See 'Mary Hays On Women's Rights in the Monthly Magazine', Études Anglaises, 14 No 3(1971), 271-82 (p 275)

77 Richard Polwhele located Hays as 'evidently a Wollstonecraftian' on the strength of *Letter and Essays* which he found, with regard to European Governments 'in a high degree, inflammatory', in 'The Unsex'd Females', pp 20-21

> which this little work was designed will be answered; and the author will have the satisfaction of reflecting that she has not entirely wasted the Master's talent. (pp. viii-ix)

This Preface introduces the concern Hays is later to develop in her novels that virtue is 'substantial' and not mere 'semblance' (p. vii). As she repeats in the Advertisement to *The Victim of Prejudice,* 'the fountain is poisoned at its source' and as she demonstrates in *Victim* 'sensible and virtuous individuals struggle against the stream, which continues to draw down the majority with destructive force'.[78] It is in order to address this need for 'truth and virtue' that Hays 'has taken up the pen' confident that 'every endeavour towards meliorating the human mind - how weak, or imperfect soever - must be acceptable in the sight of that Being whose nature is pure benevolence, and "no effort will be lost"' (p. ix). Here, the early expression of female, literary humility was very quickly transformed into a consolatory justification of failure, through 'endeavour' which echoed the comfort already provided by Helvetian philosophy. *Letters and Essays* is an optimistic entry into popular writing as 'the spirit is gone abroad, first principles are on every subject reverted to, and causes must eventually produce their effects' (p. viii). The book is a strange fusion of pagan and sacred in that, as the rest of the title '*Moral and Miscellaneous*' suggests, it consists of material to be found in conduct-books and books on education and of essays on politics, divinity and philosophical necessity. That these are not inappropriate in such a collection is evidence of the very wide-ranging nature of Dissent's intellectual and moral preoccupations. As Hays put it 'received opinions ought to be brought to the test, as in this state of imperfection there is scarcely any thing which will not admit of, nay, does not call for, emendation' (p. 1).

I think it is significant that, in this early publication, interspersed among her essays on 'the Meliorating and Beneficial Effects of Pulpit Elocution', 'Remarks on Conversation and Friendship' and "on reading Romances' she includes, for longest discussion, the topics of 'Materialism' and 'Necessity'. For Hays these topics were not merely speculative but informative and potentially helpful for daily living. They become central to her novels and were firmly grounded in her Dissenting beliefs.

For the present study these two sections are paramount although some of the others also focus on the power of causal circumstances and shaping education. Possibly referring to Letters XII and XIII in particular, Theophilus Lindsey claimed that 'the scarecrow doctrine of Necessity you have known how to strip of its horrid form, and to familiarize and make it easy, and I think to vindicate its truth, to those that will read and make use of their understandings' thus, acknowledging her popularising of difficult concepts.[79] What she does is to discuss materialism in relation to a deity, an apparent

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78 *Letters and Essays*, p. viii.

79 Letter from Theophilus Lindsey to Hays, 15 April 1793. Dr Williams's Library. These are the chapters which the *Monthly Review* 13 (1794) pp. 472-73 (p. 472) singles out as consisting of 'observations [which] are slight and general; such as will scarcely afford the inquirer after truth much information or satisfaction.

contradiction which she sees confined to 'words' only, (p. 161), and she uses the ideas of Necessity to 'prove' the resurrection. In what we shall see as an echo of the Helvetian notion of genius she concludes that 'whatever our similarities the deciding factor is that 'where energy and ardent passion have delineated strong expression, in proportion as our own feelings are excited by sympathy, we are, as vice or virtue prevails, affected with love or aversion' (p. 165).

In terms reminiscent of her *Cursory Remarks* she highlights the importance in moral education of 'repeated habits', and 'reiterated associations' concluding that 'the notion of mechanism affords a surer basis for the success of our endeavours in what respects moral qualities than any other' (p. 167), because, through 'the laws of association' children, for instance, are excited to virtue and restrained from vice. Urging her correspondent to consider her opinions to be not 'entirely unworthy of your candid attention', she introduces a notion which reverberates through her later novels: 'Let us have the courage to trace our ideas, as far as we have the ability through their whole train of consequences; this can afford the only test of truth' (p. 167).

As in much of her writing Hays has selected corroborative authors carefully so as to provide support for her own principles. In this case, she calls on the 'Helvetian' support of Alexander Pope, Joseph Priestley and Dr Collins all of whom supply evidence for her arguments. For instance, in Letter XIII she paraphrases Pope's *Essay on Man* to help her 'prove' that 'philosophical necessity [...] is in harmony with the perfections of the Supreme Being' and that it is:

> more worthy of Infinite Wisdom, to order and provide for all possible events, by a series of (what we term) mechanical causes and effects so constructed, as to be ultimately productive of the greatest general and individual good, than by allowing philosophical free-will to man. (p. 176)

Needing to accommodate the presence of evil within Necessity she draws on the 'school of adversity' theory so that she can argue that '"relative evil produces general good;" [sic] misery calls forth benevolence, suffering fortitude, tyranny patriotism, necessity exertion, etc' (p. 179) so that, 'these very sufferings may have a rectifying tendency, and may be links in a chain of causes and effects, that will eventually terminate in the highest felicity' (pp. 183-86). This proposition will be a structuring feature of Hays's heroines' attempts to turn negative experiences to good. It is these experiences which refine the heroines' responses into defiance and determination. Similarly, she summons Joseph Priestley and Dr Collins to offer support for the Helvetian belief that government influence 'will actually tend to produce virtue, by supplying sufficient motives to the practise of it' (p. 191), and that praise and punishment are 'necessary causes to determine certain men's wills to do what we desire of them' (p. 86). She is optimistic about the prospect of a

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They are, in short, nothing more than a faint echo from the Priestleyan school, in which Miss Hays appears to be a devoted disciple'.

future society in which the relationship between 'virtue' and 'happiness' will be fully recognised and encouraged. She is not articulating specific concern for a change in attitudes to female virtue and happiness but the rest of *Letters and Essays* shows that this was very much at the forefront of her thoughts as she was writing it. Thus demonstration of her dependence on more authoritative male figures is typical of her early writings and lessens noticeably as she finds her own 'voice' to express concerns which become more and more specifically related to her own experience. She found the medium of the novel form more conducive to this self-reliance, especially as Dissent had shown her both the necessity of, and benefits arising out of, analysis of the shaping circumstances of one's own life.

It seems clear that dissent was able to corroborate Hays's belief in the power of necessity on the individual's life. At this stage in her philosophical development Hays was able to interpret this mediation as positive and optimistic. As long as the power of circumstance, whether in secular or spiritual areas was recognized, change might be anticipated. Hays saw her contribution to this change as partly lying in her ability to disseminate this knowledge through her writing. She had not yet followed the philosophical implications to their ultimate conclusions. This was to wait until she could convert her direct experience into the novels which were to offer her the opportunity to explore and re-examine the apparent optimism of this early period.

DISSENT'S INFLUENCE ON THE NOVEL

Because of its stress on the individual conscience, Dissent also promoted interest in confessional literature, urging the scrutiny of the manifestations of individual conscience. The emotional experience of faith was not denied but was rather to be used as an index of what lay behind it and, therefore, powerful emotion was to be dissected and translated into knowledge, as a monitor of response which lay between cause and effect. For instance, apparently, George Dyer thought of a diary '"as a kind of check to the waywardness of passion or any frivolity of character and as a register of the most important transactions of life"'.[80]

Important for an aspiring author was the educational obligation to interrogate the sensations which form the associations. To benefit from experience it would not be sufficient for life to be merely lived, but that it should be scrutinized and dissected into past phases in order to reveal the experience *necessarily* to come: A + B = C, an equation as incontrovertable as those Hays was studying under Hugh Worthington's guidance.[81] A disciple such as Hays would be encouraged to foresee her future, rationally, as mapped out by the experiences or associations she had already received. At the same time, just as spiritual autobiographies had helped to produce the novel form, so Dissent's stress on

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80 Quoted in Lincoln, p. 55.

81 See letter from Hugh Worthington to Hays, 17 January 1794. Dr Williams's Library.

'the external circumstances which have contributed to the formation of moral and intellectual character' encouraged a rise in the Radical 'confessional' novel and was equally at home with the aims of Jacobin writers. As Gary Kelly has shown, in the 1790s the first-person confessional narrative came to be an essential device in the fictional argument of English Jacobin writers.[82] The ability to trace stages of development became a Radical imperative arising directly out of sensationalism and Dissent. The implication of the radical writers' preoccupation with individual experience and first-person and confessional narrative will be explored more fully in chapter four. Such elaborations on the stages by which one had reached the present could be made into comforting explanations for lack of success or in radical terms for 'errors' and 'prejudices', and offered a reason for the self-indulgence of confessional literature. One's existence is made radically interesting if only in a condemnatory sense. Gary Kelly refers to a movement 'from spiritual autobiography to epistolary novel, and from witness to personal salvation in a fallen world, to conflict of self against self in a treacherous and deceptive social world, to mere self-authenticating self-expressiveness'.[83] Similarly, when the present, and certainly the future, are uncertain then dwelling on the past, even if made to be seen as foolish and erroneous, has a certain appeal. This was education from experience at its most extreme. Whilst primarily concerned with the need to accommodate a God, Dissent had, in fact, become an accommodation of self-justification.

As the present chapter's opening quotation suggests, 'personal narratives' were welcome bench-marks against which to assess individual progress. They also provided access into a personal relationship such as that of mentor/pupil and in fact in their revelations helped cement such relationships. As we shall see in chapter four Hays was to re-evaluate the efficacy of a position she had so desired.

Many novelists emerged out of this background, notably Robert Bage,[84] William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft, Gary Kelly going so far as to claim that *Things As They Are* 'was, from the evidence of the natures and names of its characters, an allegory of Protestant, not to say Dissenting history: the struggle for truth and for liberty, and the continual risk of incurring for that reason all the horrors of intolerance, persecution, and civil strife'.[85] Similarly, he sees Holcroft's *Hugh Trevor* as 'a Dissenter's self-examination and English Jacobin description of "things as they are" all rolled into one'.[86]

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82 Gary Kelly, 'Jane Austen and the English Novel of the 1790's', in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists 1670-1815*, ed. by Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp. 285-306 (p. 286).

83 ibid.

84 Although perhaps not a Dissenter 'there is ample evidence in his novels that he sympathized with' them. See Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 21.

85 ibid., p. 208.

86 ibid., p.152. See also Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially chapter one.

Dissent's insistence on the supremacy of experience and the need to trace this back to its source had a direct influence on both a novel's content and its form. Interrogation and repetition of events through narrative re-telling being one instance of this. Stories within stories provided an ideal opportunity for the hero or heroine to interrogate this experience. Many novelists chose to use their own lives to provide the basis for such interrogation which could, at least in Dissenting terms, be seen as more 'truthful' than fictional experience. As Hays pointed out:

> the business of familiar narrative should be to describe life and manners in real or probable situations, to delineate the human mind in its endless varieties, to develope the heart, to paint the passions, to trace the springs of action, to interest the imagination, exercise the affections, and awaken the powers of the mind. A good novel ought to be subservient to the purposes of truth and philosophy.[87]

Similarly, the first-person narrative which arose out of the tradition of the spiritual autobiography,[88] accommodates a new need for a more representational and exemplary, literature and in the 1790s the 'first-person confessional narrative came to be an essential device in the fictional arguments of English Jacobin writers'.[89] Hays's title for her second novel *The Victim of Prejudice* proclaims its representative development out of personal history, the victim's name being suppressed in order to deflect focus on her as a particular example.

Given Dissent's new concern with the position of women, it is not surprising that many female writers were 'nurtured in Dissenting circles, whatever their original religious background'[90] These would include Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Amelia Opie, Eliza Fenwick, Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith, all of whom were concerned with the development of the female heroine, the accommodation of the passions, and especially the need for greater educational possibilities. What Hays contributed was an exploration not only of Dissent, the key to female independence, but also of Dissent, the causally limiting philosophy, which her novels insist actually obstructs such independence.

Hays's early experience of dashed hopes on the death of John Eccles had given her an opportunity to adopt a new role: that of martyr. Even such a negative role might become an attractive proposition where other, more positive, inroads were denied. After all, it was this aspect of William Frend which first attracted him to Hays whose 'apprehension of magnanimous principles' was 'cemented by a sympathy with what I conceived injustice and misfortune' (Letter 33). Much of her writing attempts to find a philosophical justification for this position.

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87 *Monthly Magazine*, 4 (1797), p. 181.

88 See G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton: New York, 1965).

89 Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, p. 286.

90 Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, p. 197.

As I am arguing that Hays's engagement with philosophy was systematic and specific, I think it is important to analyze similarities and differences between Helvetian and Godwinian thinking in some detail in order for a philosophical reading of the novels to emerge and in the next long and detailed chapter we shall examine the ease with which she is enabled, like her heroines, to become a 'martyr to philosophy'.[91]

91 See opening quotation to this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHY: HELVETIUS AND GODWIN

> I highly respect and esteem you, your conversation always interests, and takes me out of myself, but some of your principles while they contradict my experience, I cannot adopt. I may be erroneous, but I am unprejudiced, I mean, that my opinions are the result of investigation, I have given up the notions of the nurse and the priest: had I been any man's disciple, it would most probably have been yours, if the system of Helvetius comes with greater conviction to my mind, it is because it coincides with my experience, and on what other foundation can I rest? (Letter 23)

THE INFLUENCE OF CLAUDE-ADRIEN HELVETIUS (1715-71)

The influence of Helvetius on British thinking has been well documented.[1] His ideas were not new, being rather a 'modification of the substance of French eighteenth-century philosophy', so that 'the individuality of his thought lies rather in the emphasis which he places on certain aspects of the "Zeitgeist" than in the uniqueness of his ideas'.[2] According to Ian Cumming 'no writer of his century, exerted an immediate influence to be compared with his'[3] and he has been considered as 'the epitome of his age'.[4] Edmund Burke felt sufficiently threatened in 1790 to include him among innovative and dangerous influences.[5] What Helvetius contributed was an ability to give 'current tendencies [...] their extremist expression',[6] and it was this ruthless logicality which attracted the radicals to him.

The Helvetian philosophy is founded on sensationalism and, as such, is another form of eighteenth-century hedonistic thinking. Helvetius's practical aims are 'to show that given certain conditions, progress is possible; to formulate the contents of progress; to point to methods about progress as conceived by him; to combat those forces that hinder the progress of humanity' and, it might be added, its attainment of happiness.[7] Of interest to someone like Hays was his disregard of gendered obstacles to this 'progress' and his insistence on the changeability of mankind, which might seem to offer liberation to women who sought substantial changes in their situation.

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1 See for instance, Mordecai Grossman; Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* trans. by Fritz C.A. Koelln & James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951); Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century: a Study of Political Ideas from Bayle to Condorcet* (London; Turnstile Press, 1954); Ian Cumming, *Helvetius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955).

2 Grossman, p. 23.

3 *Helvetius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought*, p. viii.

4 ibid., p. 77.

5 'We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers'. See *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien, pp. 181-82.

6 Grossman, p. 77.

7 ibid.

SELF-INTERESTED VIRTUE

Helvetius's main emphases are on the virtuous utilization of the senses, empirical examination of data, the determining nature of circumstances and, importantly, the virtue of individual happiness as being productive of general happiness. It is this latter unapologetic pursuit of one's own happiness which Hays adopts as her rallying cry in her fight against the less accommodating, self-obliterating philosophy of Godwin. Hays's letters constantly reiterate her claim that 'the general good [...] would be nothing to me if I were to experience no individual benefit' (Letter 7). She continues 'However we refine, every individual is a world to himself, and happiness, I must again repeat, is the only valuable end of existence, or existence must be vain!'. The Preface to *De l'Esprit* (1758),[8] reveals its implicit appeal to empiricist thinking with which Hays aligned herself:

> The knowledge of the mind, when we consider it in its most utmost extent, is so closely connected with the knowledge of the heart, and the passions of men, that it was impossible to write on this subject, without treating, on that part of morality at least, which is common to men of all nations, and which in all governments can have no other object in view than the public advantage.[9]

This was a seminal work which Norman Hampson claims was 'the book which was regarded as the very embodiment of the Enlightenment',[10] whilst Ernst Cassirer quotes Alfred Baeumler's opinion that it 'was one of the most read and most often quoted works of the second half of the century'.[11]

If, as Helvetius argued, happiness is man's end, self-interest is his means, which is in direct contrast to another familiar strain of eighteenth-century optimism: benevolence. Furthermore, it is experience which dictates the terms of Helvetian self-interest, just as it is experience which leads Hume and the believers in natural benevolence, to refute it. Helvetius is able to override any apparent opposition between the moral and the physical by making the two compatible through the intervention of sensation. Knowledge, like happiness, lies in this sensation because 'philosophy, with Helvetius, does not start in a disinterested love for truth. Nor does it, in his view, find its consummation in the discovery of the truth. Its origin is love of happiness; its consummation is its application'.[12] As we shall see this disregard of abstract concepts outside of individual happiness is what led Godwin ultimately to reject Helvetius for a more disinterested engagement with daily experience.

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8 The following translation may have been the one known by Hays: *De l'Esprit: or, Essays on the Mind, and its several faculties*. Written by Helvetius. Translated from the edition printed under the Author's inspection. (London: n. pub., 1759). I refer to this first edition throughout my study.

9 ibid., p. iii.

10 *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 199.

11 Cassirer, p. 319.

12 Grossman, p. 78.

The senses are, then, to be cultivated not denied. The Helvetian philosophy is inherently optimistic because sensationalism presupposes a changing and therefore changeable world, in that 'sensationalism gives the assurance that what is desired can be accomplished and points to a method of accomplishment'.[13] Furthermore, his extreme sensationalism assumes that 'all we are, all that we know, all that we do, is the product of sense experience coming from the environment, from without, [and this] gave promise that the realization of human happiness can be brought about by controlling the environment [to] produce an individual capable of moral behaviour - of happiness'.[14]

Helvetius's stress is on the fact that the individual is malleable, open to moral negotiation because s/he is 'neither good nor bad, but ready to be either'.[15] Within this perspective, women had nothing to lose in basing their moral position firmly in their external environment, and much to gain by rejecting traditional concepts of feminine weakness and inferiority as being natural.

SELF-LOVE AND THE PASSIONS

According to Helvetius, self-love or 'the constant pursuit and flight'[16] from pain and to pleasure, is to be carefully nurtured because it is the 'buds of self-love, which by unfolding themselves give birth to the passions; whence spring all our virtues and vices'.[17] Ultimately, self-love becomes the basis of morality and this latter is to be pursued purely for the pleasure it promises. Mankind has a duty to search out the means for individual happiness through the raised passions so that self-motivation is in itself applaudable and not at all shameworthy. Self-interested man or woman was then, to be the instigator of a progress which was to become simultaneously a social one, but, in order for this not to be incompatible, s/he had to be taught to identify the claims of individual self-interest with those of society. Helvetius enables the individual to see her/himself as of the greatest importance, whilst simultaneously encouraging that importance to be subsumed within society's demands. In radical terms the Helvetian doctrine appeared to show individual and social desires as compatible.[18] Within this obvious paradox the individual becomes an essential agent of the progress s/he apparently initiates but the individual does not have to perceive the connection or feel any motivation to action other than for the pleasure to be gained. Any reliance on abstract concepts of morality would have to form part of this pleasure principle.

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13 ibid., p. 53.
14 ibid., p. 79.
15 *De l'Esprit*, p. 121.
16 *A Treatise on Man*, I, p. 310.
17 *De l'Esprit*, p. 121.
18 Grossman points out that 'the individual has to be seen to be, and in a sensational philosophy, always is, central, whilst, in reality, the individual is merely a form of interaction between his needs and those of society. Hence the paradox which sets the emancipation of the individual upon the demands of society', Grossman, p. 103.

Where Godwin stressed 'self-oblivion',[19] Helvetius encouraged the individual to perceive herself as of the utmost importance, even in social terms, Helvetius seeing it as the role of government to ensure that 'the destructive self-seeking of individualism' is overcome by encouraging this identification to be seen.[20] Thus:

> the virtuous man is not then he who sacrifices his pleasures, habits, and strongest passions to the public welfare, since it is impossible that such a man should exist; but he whose strongest passion is so conformable to the general interest, that he is almost constantly necessitated to be virtuous.[21]

Helvetius recognised that external incentives were necessary to make the individual less 'ignorant' of this fusion of interests. Altruism is incompatible with and unnecessary within this system. What Helvetius contributed was his linking of self-love to environmental control through education to the extent that 'education can do all'.[22] Education creates an 'artificial harmony' whereby 'intelligent self-interest' may produce the desired social virtue.[23] This involves the legislator because 'it is then only by good laws that we can form virtuous men' and, importantly 'in order to compose such laws, it is necessary that the human heart should be known'.[24] The legislator has a duty to work with, not against, the passions and to cause 'the passions to bear no other fruit but probity and wisdom'.[25]

Whereas the Godwinian individual is deemed to be reliant on 'private judgment',[26] Helvetius is less sanguine about an individual's ability to judge disinterestedly, and replaces Godwinian judgement with government incentives, thus making 'error' more impersonal and forgiveable. This is, of course, potentially attractive, in that it disconnects the agent from intuitive, moral responsibility: social virtue is a contradiction in terms because 'the love of others is [...] never any thing else in man than an effect of the love of himself'.[27] Thus, in Helvetius we have a deliberately artificial, social organization of happiness, and a deliberate engagement with it, aspects which initially, at least, attracted radicals, including Godwin, to it.

THE ROLE OF THE PASSIONS

Because moral success and failure are dependent on external circumstances, it becomes the responsibility of others to ensure that a 'well-ordered society is one in which

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19 In the first edition Godwin stresses the term 'disinterest' but in the second he introduces the more specific opposition to Helvetian self-interest in the term 'self-oblivion'. See *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, p. 432: 'we are capable of self-oblivion, as well as of sacrifice'. See also the next section of this chapter and Letter 23. Unless specified all future references are to this first edition and will be placed in parenthesis in the text. Subsequent references are to *Political Justice*.

20 Philp, p. 48.

21 *De l'Esprit*, p. 188.

22 *A Treatise on Man*, II, p. 392.

23 Martin, pp. 182-83.

24 *De l'Esprit*, pp. 120-21.

25 ibid., p. 121.

26 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 120-37.

27 *A Treatise on Man*, II, p. 17.

men's natural needs for self-preservation, security and happiness are met'.[28] According to Helvetius, the product of self-love, the passions, which traditionally moralists had sought to suppress, should be mobilized for virtuous ends and, rather than allowing them to develop arbitrarily, or suppressing them, legislation must actively encourage them: 'the more lively our passions are, the greater are the effects produced by them. Thus success, as all history proves, constantly attends the people who are animated by strong passions.'[29] They need unequivocally to be encouraged so that they continue to their utmost the chain of virtuous action which self-love has set in motion. As this clearly is a dangerous facility, most of *De l'Esprit's* Third Essay concentrates on locating these passions within the social and moral arena. It is because of their motivational power that we owe to 'strong passions [...] the invention and wonders of arts; and consequently they are to be considered as the germ productive of genius, and the powerful spring that carries men to great actions'.[30] A corresponding proposition which Hays's Emma Courtney examines is that it is only the force of the passions 'that can counterbalance [sic] in us the force of indolence and stupidity to which we are incessantly gravitating'.[31] Hence, we are offered two alternatives only: the nurturing of passions in the belief of their potential or, the adoption of 'indolence and inertia'.[32]

Helvetius makes no distinction between discrete passions as it is the motivating power they signify which is paramount and not the tendencies they objectify:

> If the ideas and actions arising from such passions as avarice and love, are in general little valued, it is not that these ideas and actions do not require great understanding and a multitude of combinations; but because both the one and the other are either indifferent or detrimental to the public, which, as I have proved in the preceding discourse, confers the appellations of virtuous or ingenious only on such actions and ideas as are useful to it.[33]

Hays uses a similar argument against Godwin when he denigrates women's elevation of the passion of love in contrast to 'love of glory' which 'is the soul of men of genius and talents in every kind'.[34] This becomes the taunt of Hays in her Letter 22 to Godwin as she quickly points out to him that 'in the present state of things [...] a few human beings, only, [...] are form'd to take their place among this high order of beings, so peculiar is the combination of circumstances necessary to produce these superior minds'. Helvetius helps Hays argue that the passion of love, as a passion, is no less worthy a one than Godwin's desire for 'glory'. Coupled with this is the circumstance of female education which has ensured that women perceive their 'worth' through the socially acceptable means of love and marriage.

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28 Philp, p. 46.
29 *De l'Esprit,* pp. 216-217.
30 *De l'Esprit*, p. 150.
31 ibid., p. 160.
32 ibid.
33 *De l'Esprit,* p. 157.
34 ibid.

Helvetius's emphasis on environmental influences vindicates Hays in her search for happiness even if of 'an inferior nature' in comparison with Godwin's 'glory', because her happiness and, most importantly, the object through which it was to be pursued, 'was adapted to that disposition which every event of my life, the education both of design and accident, had fitted me for' (Letter 22). Hays and her creation Emma Courtney are vindicated by Helvetius in their pursuit of the passion of love and self-gratifying desire. *De l'Esprit* insists that an object to awaken strong passions is not only desirable but all-embracing to a 'man of genius': 'By the word Strong Passion, I mean a passion, the object of which is so necessary to our happiness that without the possession of it life would be insupportable'.[35]

Strong passions and motivating 'objects' are interdependent in Helvetian thinking. Hays makes it clear that she, at least, sought to understand her situation philosophically and in particular, in Helvetian terms, when she methodises her past relationships into some form of philosophical position: 'After the death of my lover [John Eccles], my heart still true to the sentiment, was restless and unhappy till it again found an object to which to attach itself' (Letter 33). As she claimed elsewhere: 'the mind must have an object' (Letter 22).

After Eccles and Frend, Hays was very aware that the causal odds were against any attempt to pursue a third object of love. Experience had demonstrated to her the unlikelihood of success: 'It wou'd be romantic now to expect those affections for which I have only lived' because of the difficulty of finding a man 'who <u>really</u> possessed those qualities I require' and because of her lack of 'personal attractions' (Letter 33). Letter 22 makes the plea 'Where, then, shall I find this object to call forth my exertions, and preserve me from langour and apathy? Shall I love again, and subject myself to a third disappointment?, [sic] this wou'd be hazardous [sic] and might be fatal'. She was also fully aware that, within the limited opportunities open to women, the removal of love left her little to hope for in the way of self and social fulfilment. At the same time that she was recognising that '"my occupation's gone"' (Letter 23), she was being forced to accept that no other 'occupation' was open to her, and that this acknowledgement of void was further cemented by female circumstances and education. She does not yet recognise that her exploration of this dilemma through her writings is to become for her this occupation, which suggests to me that she also saw her literary contribution as a deviation from female behaviour, or as a detour from 'the beaten path'. She confronts Godwin with the 'injustice' of such circumstances: 'You tell me, a road is open where I may pursue happiness in a different direction, place then the happiness, where I may distinctly apprehend it, at the end of this road, or tho' I may have the power, I shall never feel the will to enter on a dreary barren path' (Letter 23).

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35 *De l'Esprit*, p. 150.

Hays, like other women educated to perceive their happiness in terms of love, could only become more aware of a failure to secure happiness once the object through which to gain this disappeared. This female education has made it illogical for Hays to see happiness on any other terms and Hays repeatedly forces Godwin to acknowledge this bind. She is not proud of her 'inadequacy' but very aware that circumstances have made optimism in the future philosophically untenable. As she says 'I am melancholy, because I conceive, I am out of the sphere in which I cou'd the most receive, and reflect, happiness, because my views, my, [sic] plans, my purposes, are broken of [sic]' (Letter 23). Both Helvetius and Godwin believed that happiness was mankind's ultimate goal but for Hays the means to this had been removed and philosophy made this knowledge more forcefully irreversible.

Helvetius pointed out the paradoxical nature of pursuing the object of desire because 'the end of the passion is not the attainment of the object toward which it is directed, but the pleasurable effect of the attained object on the self as agent'.[36] As we shall see this provides a philosophical foundation for Emma's pursuit of Augustus Harley in *Memoirs* which goes far beyond the conventional desire for a lover. The object represents the attainment of happiness and, as such, legitimates the search for it through any of the passions. Hays accuses Godwin of ignoring this, again referring to women's pursuit of love. Characteristically she brings the discussion around to direct experience: hers and Mary Wollstonecraft's whose 'disappointments' Godwin does 'not treat fairly' because 'you select, merely, the object, calculate its worth, abstractedly, and say it is not deserving a regret' (Letter 23). Society's role is to decide which of these passions are necessary to its utility and again, paradoxically, it is not until society has progressed sufficiently to be able to perceive the 'truth' of its moralistic role that these passions may be perceived as useful to it. Again, society intrudes into the personal by having the means to decide on the potential value of what the individual must perceive as personal gratification.

Problematically, the removal of the object does not necessarily remove the passion, but rather creates a void and a feeling of pain, which in turn intensifies the thwarted passion which might become dangerous and lead to error. This is because the passions 'fix our attention on that particular part of the object they present to us, not allowing us to view it on every side'.[37] Hence the need for the guidance and strengthening of legislation and education but legislation is not yet in a position to perceive this need. Hays understood this and the resultant hiatus caused by the removal of the object as 'all the associations, habits, and plans, connected with this object' are also frustrated (Letter 23). Her engagement with philosophy was, therefore, making her position worse by reminding her of the paradoxical nature of Helvetian optimism and its basis in future improvement. This

36 Grossman, p. 86.
37 *De l'Esprit*, p. 8.

frustration is similarly exacerbated because female education has located the desired object wholly in love:

> With women, the connection of this affection with other sentiments is still more wide and complicated than with men, generally speaking, their establishment, all their importance in society, yes, their very social existence, is close-twisted with it, it is then necessarily made, with them, a primary pursuit, their whole education has this tendency, and unless you cou'd make them wholly independent of circumstances, you cannot cure the effects which these trains of thinking and acting produce (Letter 23).

Helvetius not only gives Hays the vocabulary to articulate her position but also the means to excuse it as well as the confidence to affirm it.

Furthermore, whether or not Godwin agreed that the object was worthy 'I am unhappy because "my occupation's gone", and when the associations I have so fondly cherished are rudely torn away, I sink into apathy, because I lose everything that endears life'. As we have seen, apathy or 'indolence and inertia', is the only alternative to 'strong passions' which lead to 'genius'. Helvetius ensures that the removal of Hays's object becomes unambiguously threatening in a mind simultaneously refusing to walk 'the beaten track'.[38] Hays chose to consider what happens when these roused passions are thwarted. What does one do with the void created which is as destructive as a stream which:

> glided gently thro' flowry meadows and wou'd have fertilised their banks, but a rough blast swept over its channel, drying its scanty sills, scorching suns drew from it exhalations, thorns and brambles were thrown into it, impeding and choking its course, while its exhausted remains settle in a stagnated pool (Letter 22)?

Helvetius, then, provided Hays with ample justification for the pursuit of the object which was to bring her the philosophically and radically desired happiness. However, Hays then introduced a further factor which would provide justification for her continued pursuit, which was not solely Helvetian and which was unequivocably rejected by Godwin. This was the 'school of adversity' theory, whereby difficulties and obstacles were thought to encourage renewed application and produce philosophical vigour. Hays refers to this idea in her letters in order to vindicate her continued pursuit of William Frend, just as Emma Courtney does, but more systematically, in *Memoirs* to answer criticism of her relentless pursuit of Augustus Harley.

As early as 1779, whilst still being able to enjoy the protection of the cult of sensibility, Hays exulted in her ability to experience a 'painfully pleasing sensation!" because 'those whose souls are replete with sensibility, whose sentiments are refined, and those who are formed tremblingly susceptible of every softer emotion, - they drink deep of the cup of misfortune, and are practised in the school of adversity' (*Love-Letters*, pp. 28-9). Again,

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38 See next section on 'Genius'.

we see Hays rejoicing in the same sort of elevation of 'difference' which sensibility promoted and which was also contained within Dissent.[39]

She reiterated this belief in her *Monthly Magazine* reply to 'J.T. on Helvetius' when she considered the truth of 'Adversity has been said to be the school of wisdom. - Why is it so? Not because adversity is a good, but because the faculties are, by difficulty, roused into exertion' whereas 'ease' or 'prosperity' encourages the mind to 'stagnate' and the spirits to 'become languid'.[40] This, at least, corresponds with Helvetius's ideas about the need to arouse the passions and so avoid 'indolence and inertia' and she goes on to quote his assertion that '"The brave and active conquer difficulties by daring to oppose them"'. More important is her claim that 'we shall never attempt to combat an obstacle which we have previously persuaded ourselves is insurmountable'.[41] She returned to this in the following year when she answers her own question 'why is adversity thought to be the school of improvement?' by quoting one of Lavater's aphorisms: '"Enquire after the sufferings of great men, and you will know why they are great"'. This is followed by a quotation by Robert Robinson: '"The rock must be convulsed ere it will produce the diamond"'.[42] She explains this maxim by observing that 'talents are invariably called forth equal to the spur of the occasion', and 'misfortune and difficulty' are elevated into necessary ingredients of 'stronger passions' which rouse 'energies which, in the lap of indolence had never existed'.[43]

Hays continually brings her argument around to support her quest for the attainment of genius, and I shall return to this in chapter four. However, Hays's letters similarly reveal that she uses the Helvetian terms of this quest in order to transform her pursuit of Frend into a justifiable duty. For as long as he refused to unequivocally reject her, suspense increased hope which stimulated, strong passions might have directed towards genius. On a less personal, more political note she wrote in Letter 2 of:

> The artificial, consequently enervated, state of society, as at present constituted; the palsy, if I may so express myself, of false refinement, requiring to be roused from its apparent morbid state by the electrical force of genius, by those persevering determined minds which are only stimulated by obstacles, and before whom ultimately, when clad in the armour of truth, every obstacle must give way.

Letter 7, after repeating the Helvetian question: 'What are passions, but another name for powers -?' goes on to link adversity with intellectual improvement:

> The mind susceptible of improvement, from whatever causes, either moral or physical, is the mind having capabilities of receiving forcible impressions; such

39 Lincoln discusses the proximity of late eighteenth-century Dissent to 'rational sensibility', p. 64.
40 *Monthly Magazine*, 1 (1796), pp. 385-87.
41 ibid.
42 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 358-60. See also note 6 to Letter 2.
43 ibid., p. 358.

> minds, into whatever trains they are thrown by outward circumstances, are prone to enthusiasm. [...] The weak and the timid, from the first failure [are pre] vailed on to relinquish their pursuits, but the bold and the persevering frequently derive from repeated disappointment, even in visionary plans new ardor![44]

Several discourses are converging here: those of Helvetius, Godwin and sensibility.

On a more personal level, Hays related the idea of beneficial adversity to her direct experience with Frend, when she claimed that 'my reason was the auxiliary of my passion - or rather, my passion the generative principle of my reason' and then frustratedly asserted that 'Had not these contradictions, these oppositions, roused my mind into energy, I might have continued tamely domesticating in the lap of indolence and apathy' (Letter 20). So many of these terms are Helvetian that it seems likely that Hays was unwittingly conflating her own belief in the 'school of adversity' theory with the wider one of Helvetian genius. Helvetius does, in fact, consider the idea as a footnote in *De l'Homme:*

> it is in general being continually forced to strive with adversity, a man becomes more thoughtful and acute: he is, therefore, always what his situation makes him. But is adversity so salutary as supposed? Yes: in the prime of life, when a habit of thinking and reflecting may be yet acquired.[45]

Whether she was aware of this or not, she repeatedly claimed the support of Helvetian-type discourse to support her pursuit because 'To be rous'd and stimulated by obstacles - and those obstacles admitting hope because obscurely seen - is no mark of weakness!' especially 'while the wintry sun of hope illumined the fairy frost-work with a single, slanting, ray' (Letter 20).

More importantly, in view of her remarks being made directly to the author of *Political Justice*, she expresses her sense of a radical duty towards Frend: 'Cou'd I have conquer'd, what I conceiv'd to be, the prejudices of a worthy man, I cou'd have encreas'd his happiness as well as my own'. Consequently, she 'deeply reason'd and philosophised upon the subject - perseverence, with little ability, has been known to effect wonders: perhaps I flatter'd myself, that I had the power of uniting some ability with perseverance [sic], and confiding in that power, I was the dupe of my own reason!' (Letter 20). There seems no doubt that Hays sought to justify her behaviour in philosophical terms, although she often confused the discourses which were influencing this behaviour.

By March 1796 she was able to claim that she felt relief after asking Frend's forgiveness for her behaviour and that, as a consequence 'I [...] see the whole affair with a cooler eye, and observe it in more points of view, than I had before done - absence magnified objects - my hopes have, now, entirely ceased, and with them, some illusions appear to be losing their force - my mind seems regaining a firmer tone - it is no longer

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44 See also *Monthly Magazine*, 9 (1800), 'Remarks on Dr Reid on Insanity' where she seems to expect agreement that 'strong passions are, to a certain extent, increased by struggles', pp. 523-24 (p. 523).

45 I, p. 358.

convulsed with uncertainty' (Letter 24). These are Helvetian terms which acknowledge his warning that 'we judge of an object from one side only to which our attention has been fixed by our passions'.[46] Hays might be said to be offering herself as living proof of the errors attendant on the passions.

Hays was aware very early in their correspondence that Godwin disagreed with this school of thought (see Letter 3). The first edition of *Political Justice* refers to the 'common opinion that adversity is the school in which all extraordinary virtue must be formed',[47] but later rejects it as being 'built upon a very obvious mistake', because of its connection with oppression, coercion and injustice. Rather, 'it is certain that truth is adequate to awaken the mind, without the aid of adversity'.[48]

GENIUS

In terms which are echoed both in Hays's correspondence, and in Emma Courtney's defiant exultation in her sense of difference, Helvetius refers to the passionless and 'stupid' men 'of sense' who 'must follow beaten paths' because 'if they forsake them, they bewilder themselves'.[49] Such a statement suggests the corollary that those who avoid the 'beaten path' indicate their superior genius or, at least, their potential for producing it. There is little opportunity for stumbling upon uncharted regions in Helvetian rhetoric. The man 'of sense' gravitates towards the other extreme of 'indolence' and 'he has nothing of that activity of soul, by which a great man in power forms new springs for moving the world, or sows the seeds of future events'.[50]

By setting up such an obvious opposition Helvetius is ensuring that the potential of the passions is elevated even above success, so that a vindication of attempt overrides any consideration of failure. In fact, failure is written into the discourse because we must expect 'a thousand irregularities' from the 'man of strong passions'.[51] It is these 'irregularities' which indicate his worth. As an indicator of possessing such strong passions the would-be genius is, indeed, obligated to act irregularly rather than display 'what is called good conduct, [which] is almost always the effect of the absence of the passions, and consequently the appendage of moderate abilities'.[52] 'Error' is praiseworthy because 'we are afraid of the lassitude of indolence' which denotes 'the man of sense'.[53] Emma Courtney claims that 'those who deviate from the beaten track must expect to be entangled in the thicket, and wounded by many a thorn - my wandering feet have already been deeply pierced' (I, p. 179). In order to see the significance of the terms Hays uses, and the

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46 *De l'Esprit*, p. 9.
47 *Political Justice*, II, p. 384-85.
48 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Robinson, 1796), II, p. 337.
49 *De l'Esprit*, p. 156.
50 ibid.
51 ibid., p. 307.
52 ibid.
53 ibid., p. 322.

importance she attaches to them, both here and in *Memoirs* I think it is worth looking at Helvetius's original example in full:

> Truths are sown by the hand of heaven, here and there, in an obscure and pathless forest; a road bounds that forest; it is frequented by an infinity of travellers, among whom are some curious men, whom even the thickness and obscurity of the wood inspires with a desire to penetrate it. They enter, but embarassed by the trees, and torn by the briars, they are disgusted with the entrance, abandon the enterprize, and regain the beaten path. Others, but their number is small, animated, not by a vague curiosity, but an ardent and constant desire of glory, pierce into the thickest part of the forest, pass the dangerous bogs, nor cease their course till chance presents them with the discovery of some truth, more or less important. That discovery made, they turn their steps, and make a path from that truth to the high road, which every traveller then perceives as he passes by, because all that have eyes may see it; and nothing is wanting to the discovery but an earnest desire to search it out, and the patience necessary to find it.[54]

There is certainly a suggestion of a superior and relentless 'chosen few' about this anecdote which might appeal to a woman grounded in non-conformity. The association of 'truth' with making one's own path is very encouraging to someone already treated as marginal. Consequently, the passionate man's errors should be forgiven whilst the timidity of 'ye men of solid understanding', despite their conduct being 'often wiser than that of the men of genius' should be condemned.[55] Until society or 'the legislator' directs them, the passions may become erroneous. Where wisdom is synonymous with prudence, it is not a prerequisite of virtue and, in fact, gets in the way of 'that principle of life and of the passions, which equally produces great vices, great virtues, and great talents'.[56] Thus, an idiosyncratic pursuit of one's desires is given philosophical and social credence.

Because it would be easier 'to give into common errors, to conform to established customs, and to resemble the rest of the world',[57] the man of passions is not only courting difference, but can expect difficulties: 'He chuses [...] to be the bank which opposes a torrent, though he should be overwhelmed by it, [rather] than a light bough floating about on the surface of the water'.[58] Not surprisingly, such a potential genius needs to be exempted from 'the rules that restrict ordinary men [because] the passion that constituted his genius was equally likely to drive him to glorious virtues or to sensational crimes'.[59] The point being that the result is less important than the experiment and one's capacity to

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54 *A Treatise on Man*, I, pp. 263-64.

55 ibid., p. 284. He continues elsewhere: 'The man of good sense does not commonly fall into any of those errors into which we are drawn by the passions; neither does he receive any of those beams of light that are owing to warm passions', p. 297.

56 ibid., p. 284.

57 ibid., p. 301.

58 ibid. Compare Helvetius' retort to 'the man of sense' in the same publication that 'a man of genius, had he vices, is still more worthy of esteem than you' (I, p. 284).

59 Hampson, p. 200.

take risks: potential success is as admirable as success itself. As in the Dissenting tradition, non-conformity has become elevated into a radically acceptable condition and, hence, would appeal to a woman on the margins of radicalism.

Norman Hampson sees this 'genius' as 'a moral law unto himself', perhaps because Helvetius changes the basis of wisdom. Helvetius transforms the 'folly', which men of genius are often accused of, into 'a proof of the highest wisdom', so that, in his formulation, 'the seed of their errors [...] is also the seed of their knowledge'.[60] Hence, mistakes are the attendant cost of trying and Helvetius vindicates failure as a likely step towards 'the seed of [...] knowledge'. It is precisely because 'passions indeed are the celestial fire which vivifies the moral world' that 'they are also the sources of the vices and most of the misfortunes of men' but this does not 'warrant moralists in condemning the passions, and exploding them under the appellations of madness and folly'.[61] As Hays puts it in Letter 16 'Could we wholly eradicate, what appears to us the foibles of every estimable character we shou'd, perhaps, destroy the ferment which gives rise to their highest excellencies', for 'what are energies, but passions? and, in the present imperfect state of things, those passions will, at times, necessarily degenerate into excess'. Helvetius gave her the confidence to almost exult in error as this could become not only an indication of one's own potential 'genius', but also a direct criticism of any social circumstances which might be seen to impede this potential. The 'necessarily', in effect, removes individual responsibility as error is an effect dependant on the cause of circumstance.

Moreover, errors are again vindicated because of their instructional, or 'warning' capacity, which their interrogation by the 'truth' of experience can reveal. This has obvious implications for radical knowledge which is awakened by rational investigation rather than spontaneous curiosity. It introduces a greyer area where emotions can be seen to lead to knowledge and understanding, and looks forward to Hays's fusion of reason and feeling in her own philosophy. Here stimulus and response become the sole arbiters of one's capacity for improvement: the greater the response to external stimuli, the greater the capacity for mental animation or 'genius'.

Crucially, anyone can be this genius provided that the circumstances are conducive to producing it: 'the inequality observable among men [...] depends on the government under which they lie; on the greater or less happiness of the age in which they are born; on the education; on their desire of improvement, and on the importance of the ideas that are the subject of their contemplations'.[62] Thus, although 'genius is common [...] the circumstances, proper to unfold it, [are] very extraordinary'.[63] Accordingly, 'the man of

60 *De l'Esprit*, p. 316.
61 ibid., p. 160.
62 ibid., p. 239.
63 ibid.

genius is then only produced by the circumstances in which he is placed'.[64] This forms the crux which persuades Hays to transform the inherent optimism of such a potential for change, into pessimism in the light of the restrictions against such change which she was experiencing. Helvetius would seem to include female subservience amongst present 'errors' which would be eradicated in future progress. Although Helvetius appears to be promoting a belief in an optimistic future, his rhetoric cannot disguise its paradoxical reliance on present conditions and this was not allowed to go unchallenged by Hays. As Catherine Macaulay shrewdly perceived:

> That happiness only exists in hope, is the maxim of the penetrating Helvetius; and all his rules of education are consequently grounded on this hypothesis. But from the invincible power of early impressions, the sagacity of Helvetius must have discovered this truth, that hope of what is distant, always speaks a present want; and that want and happiness can never unite.[65]

Helvetius himself acknowledged the contradiction inherent in his belief that 'education makes us what we are' because it enables us to perceive what we are already like: 'we wanted only to know ourselves', and education confirms this knowledge.[66] This has enormous implications for female education which Hays was claiming to be directly opposed to female nature and especially female virtue.[67] According to Helvetius education provides corroboration for our own behaviour, but such an ideal education only really becomes available after society has changed enough to perceive the need for its provision, and this has clear implications for the predicament of women who were dissatisfied with their own educational opportunities and the resultant limitations on their lives. According to Helvetius, the educator's responsibility is to define the desired person and then to place him or her in the appropriate environment to bring about the necessary educational experience. The implications of this process of environmental control are paramount and will be dealt with later in this chapter when Helvetian and Godwinian approaches to determinism are compared.

THE GODWINIAN ALTERNATIVE

> The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely to talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice is not an unmeaning rant; and that, when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something which they are able to practice. An idea like this reconciles us to our species; teaches us to regard with enlightened admiration the men who have appeared to lose the feeling of their personal existence in the pursuit of general advantage; and gives us

64 ibid.
65 *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London: Dilly, 1790), p. 80.
66 *De l'Esprit*, p. 240; Preface to *A Treatise on Man*, p. i.
67 See chapter five on *The Victim of Prejudice* which explores the distorting effects of female education.

> reason to expect, that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgment and their individual will with abstract justice and the unmixed approbation of general happiness. (I, pp. 359-60)

'Benevolence', 'virtue', 'happiness', are key words in the Godwinian vocabulary, and especially within *Political Justice*, but these terms are equally at home in Helvetius's thinking, so we need to consider what made Hays gravitate towards a discourse which ultimately has the same aims as Godwin's, but which had to be rejected by the 1790's radicalism of Godwin.

There are many similarities between the ideas of Godwin and those of Helvetius, and Godwin acknowledged a debt to the philosophes in general, and to Helvetius in particular, whom he was reading when a minister at Stowmarket, Suffolk from 1778-1782.[68] But, although their overall aim of social improvement might be the same, their ways of reaching this goal utilized very different philosophical frameworks. Whilst 'Godwin's thought is very close to that of the eighteenth-century French philosophes [and he] shares the interest of these Enlightenment philosophers in right reason, truth and justice',[69] according to Mark Philp, 'it seems reasonable to suppose that Godwin began to recognise at an early stage that the challenges which his adoption of "French principles" held for his faith in private judgement and benevolence' were untenable.[70]

Godwin is a sensationalist, agreeing with Helvetius that man is a creature of sensation, and that 'it is that from which all the intellects with which we are acquainted date their operations' (I, p. 53), but he refuses to make these sensations alone responsible for one's moral actions. Instead he insists on some intervention between the impressions we receive and the actions we take. This intervention is through the understanding or the reason, which interrogates these sensations turning them into 'inducements to action' (I, p. 52).

JUSTICE[71]

From the start of *Political Justice* Godwin makes it clear that it is the more abstract, rational principles which are to take almost total precedence over personal disposition within his radical discourse, and he takes their finest expression to be found in the theory of 'the greater good' as supported by the principle of justice. By introducing this 'fixed and immutable' principle (I, p. 98), Godwin shows that man does not need either self-interest or benevolence to motivate him to 'all moral duty' (I, p. 80), both of which demand the ascendancy of the self over all other considerations. Because, in rationalistic terms, any moral action 'must be either right or wrong, just or unjust' (I, p. 81), justice can be made

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68 Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 205.

69 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence On Modern Morals and Happiness* ed. by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penquin, 1976), p. 18.

70 Philp, p. 57.

71 Hays's engagement with the principles of 'justice' and 'sincerity' will be explored more fully in chapter four.

the sole determining factor in moral decision. But justice also needs a determinant, and Godwin locates this within man's social relationships, making it 'a rule of conduct' (I, p. 81), because 'justice is reciprocal' (I, p. 88). But, importantly, Godwin then continues to expand this connection by showing how 'the same justice, that binds me to any individual of my fellow men, binds me to the whole. If, while I confer a benefit upon one man, it appears, in striking an equitable balance, that I am injuring the whole, my action ceases to be right and becomes absolutely wrong' (I, p. 87).

Justice, then, becomes the determinant of all man's actions, but justice needs the support of subsidiary, but important accomplices, all of which appeal to the reason. These are 'knowledge', 'truth', 'sincerity'. Because man is predominantly rational, he only needs to acquire knowledge for him to work out for himself, the justness of his action, and the pleasure to be gained from it. With knowledge, man cannot fail to make the correct decision, and hence, decision for action. Therefore with knowledge the guilty 'never choose evil as apprehended to be evil. Whenever a clear and unanswerable notion of any subject is presented to their view, a correspondent action or course of actions inevitably follows' (I, p. 75). According to Godwin it is wrong for man to adopt moral principles, which have not been taken in by his understanding, but once the justice has been perceived, he can, henceforward, depend on his own 'private judgment'. This is very different to Helvetius's dependence on external interference, an interference which Godwin found potentially manipulative and coercive. His only dependence on other persons lies in the need for them to sincerely communicate the knowledge which will enable the rational man to make his just calculations.

Within this moral framework, any individual action is either just or unjust, in the terms of the benefit of the whole, so that 'if justice have any meaning, it is just that I should contribute every thing in my power to the benefit of the whole' (I, p. 81). The rightness of this outlook has to be internalised by the understanding, and it is to this faculty that justice appeals. Through the understanding, justice is transformed into 'a principle of deduction in all cases of moral enquiry' (I, p. 90), and thus he posits a morality based on ethical calculation on the part of the subject which is totally outside the realm of the feelings.

By substituting the rational principle of justice, Godwin was able to deny any need for external intervention with man's ability to reason, and make moral decisions. Considerations of feelings or of self-gratification have no influence on Godwin's thought. Within the 'greater good' theory, as ratified by the understanding, justice arbitrates on all moral decisions, and denies any accommodation of felt spontaneity. The rational principle provides a calculated spontaneity. Thus one's individual life becomes a complacent recognition of the need to maximise one's contribution to this good: 'I am bound to employ my talents, my understanding, my strength and my time, for the production of the greatest quantity of general good. Such are the declarations of justice, so great is the

extent of my duty' (I, p. 88). A corollary of justice as an eradicator of error is contained in Godwin's stress on 'sincerity' without which *Political Justice's* optimistic confidence is heavily undermined.

SINCERITY

According to Godwin, sincerity is a necessary adjunct to justice, without which justice cannot be perceived as it presupposes sincere dissemination of truth which is non-coercive (I, p. 239). In order for this situation to arise 'all that is necessary is, that I should practice no concealment [...] that I should have no secrets or reserves, but be always ready to return a frank and explicit answer' (I, p. 279). Its opposite, secrecy, causes error and is pernicious. This has enormous implications for Hays's Emma Courtney who is willing to practice sincerity but who has not the satisfaction of its return. Sincerity is such a valuable adjunct to justice that 'how much better [than the popish practice of confession] would it be, if every man would make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?' (I, p. 240). As we shall see, Emma Courtney tries this to her cost. The confessional presupposes a trusty confessor, yet Godwin's confessional is ill equipped for trust if the agent is not yet prepared for his/her role as confessor. Godwin concentrates on the role of the confessee taking for granted that of the confessor, and he admits in the third edition that 'it appears that the only species of sincerity which can in any degree prove satisfactory to the enlightened moralist and politician is that where the frankness is perfect, and every degree of reserve is discarded'.[72] This presupposes reciprocation of the principle, and significantly, he continued, 'true sincerity will be attended with that equality which is the only sure foundation of love, and that love which gives the best finishing and lustre to a sentiment of equality'.[73] We shall see that neither equality nor the effects of love will be possible for Emma Courtney because sincerity is lacking on Augustus's side.

In Godwinian discourse sincerity is fundamental to moral progress. As Godwin states, 'truth, when adequately communicated, is, so far as relates to the conviction of the understanding, irresistible'. But adequate communication presupposes a communicatee of the right understanding, who can perceive this truth, and 'this is why 'as Don Locke puts it 'we must encourage frankness and sincerity, why we must reject all deception and secrecy'.[74]

DISINTEREST

The theory of the 'general good' has obvious implications for the good of the individual, and the principle of justice which supports the greater good, clearly denies any justification of self-interest. Rather, Godwin insists on the practice of 'disinterest' and 'self-

72 2nd edn, I, p. 342.
73 ibid., pp. 342-43..
74 Locke, pp. 94-5.

oblivion' so that nothing interferes with one's contribution to the whole.[75] Godwin elaborates on this in the second edition of *Political Justice* when he shows how 'we are at length brought to approve and desire' the happiness of others 'without retrospect to ourselves' to the extent that, like Adam Smith's benevolent man,[76] 'we are able, in imagination, to go out of ourselves, and become impartial spectators of the system of which we are a part'.[77] It is because we are only one part of the larger whole that we can 'then make an appraisement of our intrinsic and absolute value; and detect the imposition of that self-regard which would represent our own interest as of as much value as that of all the world beside'.[78] Thus we come to enjoy 'the pleasure of disinterestedness'.[79]

Within Godwin's discourse self-interest, paradoxically, becomes an unnecessary impediment to our pleasure, so that 'no man so truly promotes his own interest as he that forgets it. No man reaps so copious a harvest of pleasure as he who thinks only of the pleasures of other men'.[80] Recognition of the justice of 'public utility' makes self-interest irrational. Thus, and in terms which suggest that Godwin has Helvetius in mind, he argues that the legislator 'is bound to recollect that the true perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness. [...] Above all he should be careful not to add to the vigour of the selfish passions. He should gradually wean men from contemplating their own benefit in all that they do, and induce them to view with complacency the advantage that is to result to others' (I, p. 360).

This principle of disinterest is in complete contrast to Hays's desire for interested, individual, affection. Letter 21 voices a common refrain that 'I cannot love mankind collectively - they are a mere abstraction to me - why shou'd I love them? - they do not make me, nor can I make them, happy. But I cou'd have encreas'd [sic] the felicity and improvement of a small circle of individuals - and this circle, spreading wider and wider, wou'd have operated towards the grand end, general utility'. The interest stimulated by an engaged, individual attachment would have contributed to a larger, less engaged, disinterested contribution. In Hays's discourse, affection has to be interested to begin with, as it arises out of passion; then it may become disinterested, as in Emma and Augustus's case.

'Self-oblivion' enables the general good to become an easier goal, as we are encouraged to evaluate the larger good and its happiness against that of our own. This is made easier because the rational man must perceive that virtue must 'begin with a collective idea of the human species' (I, p. 255). Godwin's discourse insists that the

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75 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 345-61, where Godwin rejects the doctrine of self-love in favour of disinterested benevolence.

76 See *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ed. by D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), p. 110.

77 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, p. 428.

78 ibid.

79 ibid., p. 447.

80 ibid., pp. 447-48.

general good must be desired for its own sake and not for any personal pleasure, which must be subservient to it. Such an outlook can only be supported by a belief in judicial benevolence, as justice, being rational, denies any intervention by the feelings. Hence, we are not subject to interference in our decisions, and are certainly free of emotional claims.

The notorious example of Fenelon and the chamber-maid succinctly demonstrates this, whereby the choice of saving Fenelon, or 'that life [...] which will be most conducive to the general good' (I, p. 82), will inevitably be made by the understanding, and because the feelings should have no claim on any moral decision made, 'it would have been just in the chambermaid to have preferred the archbishop to herself. To have done otherwise would have been a breach of justice' (I, p. 83). The justice of an act which procures the general good, overides every other consideration, even, or especially, 'private affections' as these are founded on such errors as duty, gratitude, obedience and so on; errors which Godwin sees as 'prejudices'. Once these 'errors' are removed, justice can emerge as the sole arbiter in our judgment. Because an idea such as gratitude, or love, has been elevated into a social virtue, this 'may serve as an apology for my error, but [it] can never turn error into truth' (I, p. 85), and is consequently inexcusable. In fact, what Godwin does is remove the apologetic nature of Helvetian error, making it impossible to find either a rational or a comforting excuse for it.

Simultaneously, disinterest leads to a sense of the 'independence' which Emma Courtney was to challenge in *Memoirs*. Independence of others is a necessary adjunct to Godwin's justice, yet Hays argues for reciprocal dependence through interested 'individual affection'. The independence she bitterly confronts is not one formed of economic security but the rationally based, judicially mediated one of Godwin's thinking in *Political Justice*. According to Hays, affection has to have a basis in self-interest (through the passions) before it can become disinterested, and, as we shall see, her writings explore the cost when a state of disinterest is achieved.

This proposition of disinterest is a main support of Godwin's theory of justice, and became one of the central issues of contention in his correspondence with Hays, as Hays insisted on showing both the inadequacies of it, and the consequences of its adoption, in her own life. In Letter 10 she first voices her doubts 'whether it may be necessary to refine quite so much, as you seem to do, respecting disinterestedness' and goes on to give her objection:

> at least, I can form no other idea of disinterestedness than that from habit we lose sight of the intermediate links of the chain, and love virtue as the miser does his money, originally for what it would procure us, ultimately for its own sake. These are the only ideas that harmonise with my present system of philosophy, convince me that it is ill founded and unconsequental [sic] and I will gladly, after the examination, exchange it for yours.

This is a correct assessment of Godwin's theory which he expands in the second edition of *Political Justice* where he also introduces the example of the 'the avaricious man' in pursuit of money for its own sake.[81]

As we have seen, Hays would be able to draw on Helvetian thinking to support her belief that it was firstly necessary to be self-interested in order for the passions to be motivated into action. However, she makes efforts to understand and to accept the new proposition put forward by her 'mentor'. Letters show her systematic attempts to substitute her own belief for that of Godwin. In Letter 23 she challenges the virtuous foundation of his theory by claiming that:

> Every human being (every animal) in a course of time acts disinterestedly, whether it be virtuous or vicious - It is merely, and necessarily, a course of fix'd habits, from a reiteration of principles and actions, of which, when, [sic] arrived at a certain distance from the spring which set them in motion, the intermediate ideas are forgotten.

In Letter 24 she confesses 'that I am not sufficiently disinterested as to expect to be happy [because] I want a certain number of agreeable sensations for which nature has constituted me - I want, perhaps, a greater number of social and civil advantages, which my education, and the society in which I have mix'd, have taught me to consider as valuable'. It is important that we see how closely integrated are the ideas of external circumstances and one's own capacity for disinterest. At every opportunity Hays returns the topic to the exonerating fact of limited female education and social expectations.

However, Letter 23 shows her to be more concerned with what she saw as the consequences of disinterest: 'I am at present suffering from the effects of my disinterestedness, if I had not foster'd a disinterested affection, half the severe returns I met with, wou'd long since have cured me'. In other words self-interested pursuit of pleasure would have informed her of her 'mistake' in continuing her pursuit, and 'mistake is the only mischief against which we ought to guard mankind'. Because her passion for Frend had become 'disinterested' she felt justified in prolonging her pursuit, although this was causing her pain and no longer pleasure: 'Could I have won him to my arms, I thought that I cou'd [elevate] and purify his mind - a mind in which I still perceive a great proportion of good - I weep for him as well as for myself!' (Letter 20). Letter 22 clarifies this by claiming that 'in the commencement of my attachment, I took many things for granted, and judged thro' other eyes than my own - Nor did I discover, that I had made any mistakes till association and habit had made my affection disinterested'. As Hays has argued, disinterest is formed out of association and habit which may make the disinterested passion virtuous but which would also make reaction to the removal of the object of this disinterest more painfully searing.

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81 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, p. 426.

VIRTUE

With their ideas of virtue, Godwin and Hays reached an impasse. According to Godwin, virtue 'consists in the disposition of the mind, and may be defined a desire to promote the benefit of intelligent beings in general, the quantity of virtue being as the quantity of desire', but this desire 'consists in a desire of the benefit of the species' and 'must begin with a collective idea of the human species' (I, pp. 254-55). Although Hays projects her desires onto 'individual' rather than 'general' benefit, nevertheless she sees the former leading inevitably to the latter. At the same time, according to Godwin 'the highest employment of virtue is to propagate itself' (I, p. 233), through the communication of knowledge, without which justice cannot be assured. Thus, as Philp says, 'we can only add to the general happiness by stimulating the conditions under which virtue emerges - that is, by engaging in the dissemination of truth' .[82]

Hays interrogates this link between truth and virtue in her own limited circumstances as a writer, and certainly in those of Emma Courtney who relentlessly tries to force truth on Augustus, thereby paving the way for justice to emerge. Her own virtue is largely denied her because she is unable to contribute to 'the conditions' necessary to its more general advancement. These interpretations of virtue will be explored more fully in chapters four and five. At present it is necessary to recognise that for Hays virtue is inevitably connected with individual happiness rather than with a struggle to aid the collective good. Noticeably, the discussion of virtue was one of the areas in *Political Justice* which Hays found difficult to accept.[83]

THE PASSIONS AND JUSTICE

Importantly, Godwin locates errors within the manipulation of the passions, which places him in direct contrast with Helvetius, who saw the thwarting of them as more detrimental than the passions themselves. Godwin argues that in their 'natural' state, the passions should be purely aiding justice, in that they spur us on to action which our understanding decides is just. In fact, 'all our passions would die in the moment they were conceived were it not for this reinforcement [of justice]' (I, p. 263). Thus, our feelings are instantaneously transformed into rationalities 'because the demands of justice are objective, [hence] we become more fully rational as we recognise and obey them'.[84] Consequently, although he concedes that 'great talents are great energies' he insists that these energies 'cannot flow but from a powerful sense of fitness and justice', so that 'a man of uncommon genius is a man of high passions and lofty design' and these passions 'will be found in the last analysis to have their surest foundation in a sentiment of justice' (I, p. 262). Hence,

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82 Philp, p. 55.

83 See Letter 3. See also Godwin's revised thinking on the relationship between virtue and individual attachments in his Preface to *St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Colbourn and Bentley, 1831; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1972) pp. ix-x, to which I refer later in this chapter.

84 Philp, p. 53.

such passions as aspiration and ambition are merely founded on a sense of unjustness, of being 'out of his place' and wishing 'to be in it' (I, pp. 262-63). Resistance to unjustness is evidence of a man 'having in him the seeds of eminence' (I, p. 263). It is, thus, justice which incites the passions and therefore Godwin can confidently retain the stimulus of the passions, whilst rejecting their control over our actions, because they are themselves controlled by his rational principle.

It was not until the second edition of *Political Justice* that Godwin directly confronted the place of the passions, using a formula very similar to the one later adopted by Hays in her *Monthly Magazine* discussion of mania.[85] In Book One, chapter five, Godwin rejects the idea of conquering a disabling passion by substituting another because this would be 'substituting another delusion in its place'.[86] This would be delusory, untruthful and, hence, pernicious. He shows how passion not only plays a part in our actions, but is paradoxically 'inseparable' from reason because, whilst 'a due exercise of reason' enables us to beget and cherish 'virtue, sincerity, justice' etc. they 'will never be very strenuously espoused, till they are ardently loved; that is, till their value is clearly perceived and adequately understood' as just.[87]

In this way, Godwin saw the passions as having a place within his system of justice, but he refused to base them on the same principle as Helvetius and Hays. It is this change in the motivating principle behind the passions which shows the wide divergence between the philosophies. Godwin's deterministic motivation of justice ensures that self-gratification has to be a secondary consideration, if it exists at all. Justice presupposes that the sensible self is, indeed, obliterated, being the product of a rational pursuit. In this sense, 'nothing is necessary but to show us that a thing is truly good and worthy to be desired, in order to excite in us a passion for its attainment'.[88] Hence Godwin argues for the retention of controlled passions, otherwise 'the passions speedily [...] convert what at first were means into ends',[89] so that, for instance, the pursuit of wealth in order to bring happiness, quickly translates itself into the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, and becomes a mere habit. Both Hays and Emma Courtney confront the implications of this habit.

Depending on his understanding, rational man merely needs to be left alone to act out his own human nature. The only reason he fails to act virtuously, or in the interests of public utility, is because he has not been left alone. This contrasts markedly with Helvetius's insistence on the intervention of education and legislation. The Godwinian man does not need rewards and punishments to lure him into virtuous acts, because he already wants to perform these. The only reason we act viciously is because of 'error',

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85 *Monthly Magazine*, 9 (1800), pp. 523-24. See discussion of Hays's *Monthly Magazine* articles later in this chapter.

86 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, p. 83.

87 ibid., I, p. 82.

88 ibid.

89 ibid., I, p. 426.

originating in lack of knowledge, so that we cannot properly calculate how best to be virtuous. The avoidance of this error depends on the eradication of social institutions, whose business Godwin sees as dependent on the promulgation of error, because of vested interests, which need to blur the truth and which become 'coercive' and 'pernicious'. The only function that the moralist, legislator, or educator has is to not impede man's knowledge, but rather to give him access to knowledge so that his own understanding can perceive 'the alternatives' open to him. He does not need to be in 'perpetual pupillage' (II, p. 669). His understanding will be able to perceive the truth once it is presented to him. This presupposes that mankind will perceive the benefits accruing from reliance on the understanding, but what of the interim, before mankind has eradicated the arbitration of feelings?

Because of the exercise of his 'private judgment', man does not need to be coerced into virtue, as his understanding has made this inevitable, so Godwin frees man from the contractual obligations of Helvetius's system, confidently permitting men 'to act for themselves' (II, p. 669).

If we compare Godwin's idea of 'self-oblivion' with Helvetius's 'it is always ourselves we love in others',[90] we may see why someone, whose experience tells her that self-interest and the pursuit of personal happiness are the predominant motivating principles, would shun such a rationalistic, self-obliterating discourse. Hays is clearly a potentially virtuous radical, in her efforts to contribute to 'utility' but, to satisfy Godwin, she needs to change her motivating principle from pleasure to justice. However, there are obvious implications of failure, in that a sense of justice is located within rationality which seems to reject the Helvetian sensationalism she found so potentially conducive to her well-being.

CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HELVETIAN AND GODWINIAN DETERMINISM

> After all, my friend, what a wretched farce is life! [...] Can [God] sport himself in the miseries of poor, feeble, creatures, forced into existence without their choice, impell'd by the iron hand of necessity, through mistake into calamity? (Letter 18)

A major obstacle to Hays's entry into radical utility lay in the terms of its own discourse. Godwinian philosophy's concern with causal relationships and the need to overcome ignorance and error by tracing effects to causes was found by Hays to contain the seeds of her philosophic pessimism. Although future error might be avoided by examination of the past, in Hays's interpretation of determinism that past had already predetermined that future. A comparison of determinism within Helvetian and Godwinian

90 *De l'Esprit*, p. 5.

discourses helps clarify Hays's position and why she found causation to be so problematic in her own life and in that of her heroines.

HELVETIAN DETERMINISM

One of Helvetius's major concerns was environmental control which is merely another form of determinism. As man is 'a machine that [... is] put in motion by corporeal sensibility', so that 'all our thoughts and will must be the immediate effect or the necessary consequence of impressions we have received',[91] free will cannot exist. Consequently these impressions need only to be made attractive via environmental control for a determined individual to be happy in his/her determined condition.

Men's conduct being determined by impressionistic circumstances, it is a matter of chance whether their interests happen to coincide with the social good. As we have seen, law, therefore, has to become the mediator between personal and social man. Helvetian determinism then, depends on state-control. Whereas traditionally, determinism, with its insistence on the inextricability of cause and effect, allows little opportunity for intervention, Helvetius demands that these causes and effects may themselves be determined. He introduces a controllable determinator, that of environmental circumstances. These are changeable and hence potentially liberating and were consequently very attractive to the English radicals, especially to the women, who could perceive a way out of, what had traditionally been seen as, their 'naturally' subservient position.

Even chance may be eradicated, as it is merely seen as the unknown cause of effects, by the ignorant. Knowledge removes its presence, and consequently it becomes essential to retrace our actions by interrogating the passions themselves, as it is 'they alone [which] can curtail, and perhaps one day totally destroy the empire of this chance; of which each discovery necessarily contracts the limits'.[92] It is these useful passions with their base in self-interest which reveal to us that chance is really a set of choices we make in order to procure the pleasure we pursue. Simultaneously, socially directed circumstances will educate us to perceive this pleasure to lie in social good, and legislation will insist that certain passions will become strengthened in order to make our contribution easy and pleasant. At the same time, it behoves us constantly to re-examine our experience in order to perceive the passion directing our choices. Helvetius offers a harnessed determinism, whose effects are similar to those of Godwin's 'disinterestedness' in that it presupposes that one wishes to choose what has been determined.

If chance is allowed to be seen as a determining factor, then lack of control is implicit, and progress would depend on apparently arbitrary whims. Chance then had to be exposed as the product of ignorance, something which, if revealed as an environmental chimera,

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91 *A Treatise on Man*, I, p. 146.
92 *De l'Esprit*, p. 157.

could be controllable and hence progressive. Consequently, Helvetius saw that a recognition of this role of chance in life could advance the progress it ostensibly curtailed. Rather than denying its existence, he changes its controlling nature to one of being controlled. As 'it is on chance that depend his opulence or poverty and the choice of his society, his friends, his books, and his mistresses. It is on chance, therefore, that depends the principal part of his instructors', and as 'it is chance, moreover, that places him in this or that position, excites, extinguishes, or modifies his tastes and passions, and that, consequently, has the greatest part in the forming of his character' it is 'chance [which] has, therefore, a necessary and considerable influence over our education'.[93] What the educator has to do is to ensure that the ideal circumstances formerly attributed to chance are made freely available.

In such ways Helvetius perceives the acceptance of causation as liberating because it reduces the element of chance which would seem to be curtailing one's control over life: 'experience informs us, that in the physical, as in the moral world, the greatest events are often produced by almost imperceptible causes'. If we investigate and discover these causes, similar great events will occur, because 'the same causes will always produce the same effects'.[94] It is merely ignorance which prevents us from perceiving these causal connections or 'the chain of effect of whose causes we are ignorant'.[95] Hays's relentless insistence on tracing effects back to causes coincided with both Godwinian and Helvetian thinking, but her letters reveal that the main reason she has such a need is in order to satisfy herself and her monitor that she cannot be held responsible for her present actions because they have been produced by the past. This past is always in connection with female education, female circumstances. These have made Hays what she is and until their change (now too late as her personality has been formed) she perceives herself caught in the void of potential happiness. It is ignorance which prevents us from seeing the utility of such a chain which could be further forged by the provision of the artificial determinators of education and legislation, the artificiality to be hidden through its appeal to self-love. It is rhetoric which discourages us from seeing the inherent pessimism within such a causal chain, as until 'chance' could be modified to incorporate the circumstances surrounding women and their environment, and permit these limited circumstances to be unnecessary, then women would continue to see themselves as trapped.

On a personal and a social level, one is urged to look forward to change and improvement, whereas the philosophy maintains that circumstances have already produced us. There is a clear hiatus here between what is potentially possible and what is happening now; what the radical novelists sought to expose as 'things as they are'. The optimism Helvetius offers is necessarily of the future, never of the present. The liberating qualities

93 *A Treatise on Man*, I, pp. 26-7.
94 ibid., II, p. 397.
95 *De l'Esprit*, p. 367.

which were admired by the radicals could be paradoxically, and simultaneously, crippling, and what Hays was to quickly perceive was, that this very future optimism was in fact, cementing the bind of present pessimism. In Helvetian causation, the desirable can only become desired if society is already convinced that it is desired.[96] As Helvetius admits, his idea of education both confirms and creates ourselves. Legislation creates an appropriate existence for man's natural tendencies to flourish, and yet this environment is artificial. Frustratingly, the tracing of circumstances, which Helvetius insists leads to the eradication of mysterious chance, at the same time, within causation can only cement circumstances which have already been put in motion, and this position becomes a central preoccupation of *The Victim of Prejudice.*

Helvetius's rhetoric does not investigate present vice, only the means to future virtue. Does mankind therefore control progress or is he controlled by it? In Helvetius it seems not to matter, whereas in Godwin, mankind's contribution had to be a direct consequence of individual understanding, and not of external incentives, which, although useful, were thought to be 'coercive'.

GODWINIAN DETERMINISM

Hays's correspondence with Godwin shows her desire to understand exactly what were the tenets of Godwin's determinism. She questions his use of the terms 'cause' and 'effect' as well as 'consequent' and 'antecedent' and it may be significant that he altered the former terms to the latter in his second and third editions of *Political Justice.*[97] Acknowledging her difficulty in understanding his usage she relentlessly pursues the correct meaning. On December 16 1795 she argues that there is a marked difference between 'antecedent and consequent' and 'cause and effect', the latter having 'a real and necessary connexion, subject to fix'd laws' whereas perhaps 'from our own ignorance' we are unable to perceive such a connection in apparently 'accidental' actions (Letter 15).[98]

She took up the topic again the next month when she claimed 'I think I can, now, clearly distinguish the terms cause and effect from antecedent and consequent - the former imply knowledge, the latter confess ignorance - but I do not, at present find from the distinction any very important changes produced in my preconceived notions. We certainly have no other ground for the expectation of successive events than our previous

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96 The self-acknowledged paradoxical nature of his thinking is perhaps most prominent in his espousal of determinism. According to Norman Hampson 'the predicament of the determinist is nowhere shown more clearly than in *De l'Esprit* [...]. This paradoxical work stands at the very turning-point of the century and contains within its self-contradictions most of the conflicting tendencies of the movement' (p. 125.)

97 See, for example, the changes from 'Not that the connexion between effects and causes is imperfect, and that part of the effect happens from, no cause at all' (I, p. 293) to 'Not that the established order of antecedents and consequents is imperfect, and that part of the consequent happens without an antecedent', (3rd edn, I, p. 372).

98 She also writes 'my philosophy will, I doubt, become sadly deranged if I banish the terms and the ideas of cause and effect; my whole system of necessity, which I conceived to be founded upon a rock, begins to totter', largely because she needs it to explain her religious conviction of God being the first cause. See Letter 15.

experience, but that does not, altogether, prove to me, whether there may, or may not, be between them a strict, necessary, connection' (Letter 16). This is the crux of Hays's determinist dilemma, in that her tentative questioning here later develops into a conviction that her experience demonstrates to her that there is indeed a 'strict, necessary, connection'. Her understanding of determinism makes her see that her past experience is the cause which will produce inevitable effects. In psychological terms it does not matter whether her interpretation is correct, only that she perceives it to be so, based on her understanding of Helvetian causation which she thinks corroborates her own experience. Helvetian causation does not contain the consoling liberation which we shall find in Godwin's.

As Godwin was able to show, rationality imposes itself on all our actions and, therefore, he was able to bring determinism under the control of the reason. If we are determined, Godwin had to accommodate rationality within determinism's limitations. He does this by removing these limitations, that is to say, the irrational nature of determinism had to be exposed as specious before it could be housed within rationality itself.

Accommodating virtue within a deterministic world is also problematic, especially as Godwin centres his morality squarely on choice or 'private judgement', but Godwin neatly resolves this by making virtue itself the determinator of our moral actions, and by exploring the parameters of choice within the certainty of causation. If man is activated by the principle of justice which can only decide in favour of the general good or virtue, his man is as 'necessitated to virtue' as Helvetius's.

Godwin devotes chapter five of Book Four of the first edition of *Political Justice* to a discussion 'Of Free Will and Necessity', categorically deciding that:

> in the life of every human being there is a chain of events, generated in that eternity which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted (I, p. 305)

and 'where all is constant and invariable, and the events that flow from the circumstances in which they originate, there can be no liberty' (I, p. 285). However, he argues that the philosophical basis for a doctrine of necessity has formerly been experience, which teaches us to observe 'similarity in the succession of events' although 'the principle or virtue by which one event is conjoined to another we never see' (I, p. 287). Thus, the traditional idea of necessity is founded on familiarity or 'vulgar prejudice' which is further substantiated by the regularity of habits. In contrast, Godwin's determinism depends on the understanding perceiving the *rightness* of an action, and it is this rational determinant which makes an act inevitable, although 'liberty' makes it appear to have been chosen by us (I, p. 299). Our rational sense of justice determines our actions, so, although we do not realise that our mind is 'self-determined', and its acts follow 'each

other as inevitably as the links of a chain do when the first link is drawn forward', so that if you 'trace back the chain as far as you please, every act at which you arrive is necessary' (I, p. 300). Godwin utilizes the more radical option of the causal chain, by perceiving it as *liberating* man from, rather than *fettering* him to, his actions and choices. By removing any possibility of external influence and replacing its motivational power with private judgement, Godwin can suggest the perfectibility of man as being implicit in his nature, which has merely to be revealed by the interrogation of 'truth'.

Although Godwin explains how our minds are also part of this chain, the limiting effect of this is exploded, simply because Godwin claims it does not matter as, even if we were aware of this, 'our minds would not glow less ardently with the love of truth, justice, happiness and mankind' (I, p. 310). As a result, and this reinforces Godwinian optimism, we would feel ourselves to be exercising our moral judgement within the *certainty* of the result, and, because we would be operating our sense of justice, we would know in advance the inevitable rightness of our 'choice'. Consequently 'we should have a firmness and simplicity in our conduct, not wasting itself in fruitless struggles and regrets, not hurried along with infantine impatience, but seeing events with their consequences, and calmly and unreservedly given up to the influence of those comprehensive views which this doctrine inspires' (I, p. 310). This 'certainty' of result, rather than inhibiting our sense of freedom, liberates us to pursue the wider implications of our actions within this sense of certainty, because 'the necessarian [...] employs real antecedents, and has a right to expect real effects' (I, p. 311). Such certainty produces optimism, rather than the fatalistic pessimism often associated with determinism, precisely because it eliminates the element of uncertainty which free will enjoys.

Whereas the causal chain may be seen as inhibiting, or even 'fatal' in Hays's terms,[99] Godwin's expansive one is unthreatening, even comforting. Godwin's chain allows an apparent freedom of action which the unknowable operations of the mind encourage. Furthermore, we can never *understand* 'the principle of causation', rather, it is our mind which constructs such a 'connection' purely out of 'familiarity' and foresight. So, whereas Helvetius exults in such an experiential connection, Godwin wishes to annihilate it, because he sees it as being founded on 'familiarity' or what he considers to be 'vulgar prejudice' (I, p. 290), which is further substantiated by the regularity of habits.[100] Instead, if he is to acknowledge necessity, which he does, he must find a rational basis for it to become 'a sufficient foundation of morality and prudence'. Regularity is insufficient, hence he undermines the centrality of experience which is merely based on habit (I, p. 296). Because we always act in a certain way, we are led to believe this is an inevitable part of our conduct. This is what Hays seems to have in mind when she challenges Godwin with

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99 See Letter 16 which refers to the 'fatal mechanism' linking her contemporary behaviour to 'its first and simplest principles', and Letter 23 which discusses 'an unbroken chain' of 'consequences'.

100 See *Political Justice*, I, p. 291.

the idea that 'the fabric can exist when the foundation has moulder'd away - habit, daily, produces this wonderful effect upon every principle and every feeling - This is your own theory!' (Letter 20).

This, of course, is what Helvetius depends upon, in offering his environmental determinant, whilst Godwin sees such a use of apparent causation as pernicious because of its foundation in supposition, and for the very reason that it does encourage external, rather than self, motivation. In contrast Godwin's determinants are our own sense of justice and the development of our understanding. Hence Godwin's chain is *reassuring,* in that it surrounds one with security resultant on the certainty of right action, once knowledge has been gained. As man is a percipient being his acquisition of knowledge is limitless, hence his progress is similarly unlimited.

Godwin can allow himself to be optimistic because of the rational, rather than experiential basis of his principles. If a man's understanding is developed he can have no liberty, but merely do what his understanding tells him is right. So, while Godwin rejects freewill, he does so with a sense of relief, not because this also rejects moral responsibility, but because it enables the agent, on the contrary, to explore his moral position *within* a decided and predictable framework. It liberates man from freedom of choice, and such freedom 'we shall easily perceive to be his bane and his curse; and the only hope of lasting benefit to the species would be, by drawing closer the connexion between the external motions and the understanding, wholly to extirpate it' (I, p. 304).

Godwin is able to locate virtuous action within his determinist doctrine, because 'the virtuous man, in proportion to his improvement, will be under the constant influence of fixed and invariable principles' (I, p. 304). In fact, *his* virtue is not only 'undiminished by the doctrine of necessity' (I, p. 308), but rather confirmed by it, as the third edition of *Political Justice* points out, because it concurs with our need to pursue pleasure through virtuous acts.[101] In other words, necessity does not interfere with the motivation for our actions; we still perceive the justice of an act and 'happiness and wisdom will be objects worthy to be desired, misery and error worthy to be disliked' (I, pp. 307-08). Motivation makes the essential difference, otherwise a man would be as 'free' as any inanimate but useful object such as a 'knife' or a 'candlestick'. Necessity thus, presents a man with the opportunity to exercise his motivations, albeit as a 'vehicle' for them.[102]

This should encourage us to be confident and sanguine about our responses which can only be virtuous. Hence, his conclusion that 'the more certain is the connexion between effects and causes, the more cheerfulness should I feel in yielding to painful and laborious employments' (I, p. 312). Similarly, a further consequence of the doctrine of necessity is:

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101 See *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, pp. 391-92.
102 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 308-9.

> its tendency to make us survey all events with a tranquil and placid temper, and approve and disapprove without impeachment to our self-possession. [...] He therefore who regards all things past, present, and to come as links of an indissoluble chain, will, as often as he recollects this comprehensive view, be superior to the tumult of passion; and will reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the same firmness of judgement, and the same tranquillity, as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry. (I, pp. 316-17)

Individual benefit is swallowed up in utility to the whole, and man is motivated to transcend his own needs. His sense of the justice of 'greater good' produces this transcendence, and this simultaneously adds to the individual's pleasure, in the Helvetian self-interested, sense:

> No man therefore, so far as he is virtuous, can be in danger to become a prey to sorrow and discontent. He will habituate himself, respecting every species of conduct and temper, to look at its absolute utility, and tolerate none from which benefit cannot arise either to himself or others. (I, p. 363)

However, Hays makes her heroine, Emma Courtney, proclaim the contradiction in such a belief when she reacts to Augustus's thwarting of her own desires: 'I survive the shock, and determine to live, not for future enjoyment - that is now, for ever past, - *but, for future usefulness.*' The separation of utility and enjoyment is emphasised when Emma goes on tartly to demand 'Is not this virtue?' (II, p. 78).

Paradoxically, the initial attractiveness of determinism, which offers to remove moral responsibility from the agent, and which, within Godwin's focus becomes liberating and comforting, is for Hays a purgatory of failure, as it ostentatiously predicts her future inutility arising out of her present misery; a misery which is pernicious to utility and hence, an impediment to radical progress. Thus, from within philosophical optimism, Hays was faced with the need to construct a doctrine of cynical resignation, which determinism simultaneously accommodates. Instead of leading her towards the useful, virtuous life it 'necessitates', it is confronting her, through its causal restrictions, with the realization that she is excluded from this desired life.

It has been essential to explore why Hays was unable to reach out and indulge in the 'freedom' which Godwinian necessity offered, and further to explore why the philosophy which women radicals at first found so liberating, was paradoxically reinforcing the limitations of the daily experience from which they were trying to flee. Raymond Williams makes the point that:

> English radicalism made its own contribution to the tradition [of *Culture and Society*], with the insight - even if from a rather simplified rationalist point of view - that you could reform character by environment, that all kinds of error and injustice should be seen in a social perspective, and then also in its encounter with a more complex experience at the point where its formula

> broke down. [...] Godwin [...] was one of the prime carriers of this formula, that by patient explanation and rational enquiry you could uncover the causes of vice and injustice and thereby enable their reform with a change of institutions. What Godwin and the others then had to live was the negation of their position by brute authoritarian power - the response, not of rational discourse as assumed by them, but of prosecution, imprisonment and transportation.[103]

What this study will suggest is that for women the formula 'broke down' on a far more basic level, that of daily experience.

I would argue that it was more than 'the pointed statement, the interesting anecdotes, [which] attracted the female radicals',[104] to Helvetius and that, in Hays at least, it was the ambiguity which his dialectic produced which attracted her to him. Her espousal of it is dictated by a paradox which encourages her to perceive the possibility of success whilst simultaneously providing her with a philosophically sound basis for failure. The possibilities for reform as argued through an insistence on a changeable environment are manifest and despite the fact that the radical Godwin saw a necessity to overthrow all forms of 'pernicious', institutional guidance his and Helvetius's aims for man and society were ultimately the same. To Helvetius, there is no reason why we cannot reach perfection, given the encouraging circumstances of suitable education and legislation, but, as environmental control is to be the instigator of improvement and 'social good', potential is more apparent than achievement.

Women radicals appear to have been more reluctant to join in the optimism of their brothers, and I would suggest one reason for this lies in the terms of the Godwinian deterministic philosophy itself, terms which were to have added significance to women in the eighteenth century, as they sought to free themselves from the dependence which their circumstances necessitated, and which the radical movement not only largely ignored but might be even said to have cemented. According to Hampson, 'the static short-term view of society of the majority made it difficult for them to think of future change, except as an educative process by which a greater proportion of the population might be elevated to the present level of the fortunate minority'. It was 'this assumption that, at best, the future would be a rectified version of the present',[105] that women such as Hays found intolerable. I would further suggest that this anticipatory, yet negative, aspect was insufficient to encourage the radical women to contribute to reform. The future for women was not attractive as 'a rectified version of the present' and their impatience with their non-role within radical discourse, was becoming manifest in their attempts to undermine rational supremacy. It is little wonder that women, such as Hays, insisted on searching for an alternative way into radical discourse, and even less surprising that they lacked sufficient

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103 *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 123.
104 Grossman, p. 17.
105 Hampson, p. 150.

confidence to do this without the support of a radically respectable, albeit opposing, philosophy.

Hays's letters to Godwin confirm that she had adopted the Helvetian philosophy because it reaffirmed the effects on her of the circumstances of her life. At the same time it seemed to offer hope that changed female circumstances would inevitably lead to enhanced female opportunities and offer women the means to gain liberty from sexual distinctions. Hence Hays's concern with foregrounding the effects of female education and her readiness to admit her errors and 'feminine foibles' (Letter 16). As Helvetius stressed, all error is merely ignorance, experience is the teacher, and the knowledge gained will secure inevitable progress. Thus every individual may contribute to knowledge by merely living and gaining experience. The radical seeker of truth had then merely to examine this experience and learn directly from it. She then had a duty to disseminate this 'truth' in order to secure the spread of knowledge and hence the eventual eradication of error. Thus the early optimism of the radicals is similarly captured in the tone of tentative confidence in Hays's early and public avowal of her relationship to Helvetius. She had, at least, found a role for herself through the now 'dutiful' examination of her own life.

However, as Hays discovered, this optimism was in fact ill-founded, and her experience was actually conspiring to deny her positive contribution to radical progress. She, like Wollstonecraft, provided a negative contribution, by presenting both her own conduct and that of her fictional heroine, Emma Courtney, as erroneous, avoidable, and, hence, in this way, instructive, so that, while not directly contributing to this progress, her life's failings could add to the general advancement by teaching how to avoid similar 'error'. Helvetius's stress on the efficacy of experience is presupposed in the uniqueness of the individual whose intellectual growth to maturity has become of radical interest, even if this interest is focused on failure. Felt experience then, for Hays, was to be more than the bench-mark, against which to test the efficacy of the philosophy, it was actually to be the terms of her philosophy. Helvetius offers support for this. The opening pages of *Memoirs* states 'learn, then, from the incidents of my life, entangled with those of his to whom you owe your existence, a more striking and affecting lesson than abstract philosophy can ever afford'.[106] As Mark Philp points out, 'philosophy, as even the empiricist must recognize, is not in the final analysis an empirical science [...] there is an almost equal under-determination of theory by evidence'.[107]

Experience then, was to be the key to her writing, and suggests the reason why both she and Wollstonecraft turned to autobiographical fiction as ways in to radical discourse. One's life could become worthy of examination and of example. One's experience then,

106 Memoirs, I, p. 7.
107 Philp, p. 60.

could be perceived as useful whatever its consequences, as 'happy are those, who acquire wisdom by the experience of others, and, by so doing, avoid those perilous enterprizes, in which the price of discretion is paid from the wreck of happiness'.[108] Failure can, hence, become as efficacious as success, and it is largely the parameters of failure which are interrogated in Hays's texts. Hence her adopted philosophy legitimated her own experience as effectively as she legitimated her philosophy through her experience. Even failings are indicative of something positive, in that they either intimate a desire to succeed, or may imply criticism of the cause of failure. In this latter respect I detect more than a hint of a playful engagement with this need to decry her life, which the philosophy in fact largely vindicates, and which the depiction of Emma Courtney belies. Hays is, in effect, interrogating the basis of failure. Her writings place her adopted philosophy at the forefront of this confrontation.

Paradox plays a large part in the optimism which made both philosophies attractive to begin with. In particular, determinism inevitably suggests a bind of some sort. If the idea of a causal relationship is strictly adhered to, once one believes that a pattern of action has been set in play, the consequences are unavoidable, even if one believes they will be detrimental. This, largely, explains why a philosophy which afforded so much optimism to many of the radical reformers could become so much dead weight to Hays. She was unable to turn from the fettering determinism of Helvetius and enjoy the liberating one offered by Godwin. This was because her experience not only confirmed the former by producing effects out of the cause of female education, but she also had little reason to rejoice in the Godwinian one which seemed to ignore the pernicious circumstances which applied to women. The call to 'independence' and 'self-oblivion', although rationally attractive, was inappropriate, Hays argued, in the majority of female cases. Hays's interpretation of determinism informs all of her writing as she sees it working through daily life. She considers the implications of every event as having a causal antecedent. This led to enormous complications and, furthermore, it allowed her to become causally powerless, but without the comfort this position offers.

Society was not yet ready to anticipate the desires of radical women and hence did not provide the situation which would make those desires attractive and socially legitimate. She argues that to 'new model society' (Letter 22), would have to be gradual, and in the meantime much suffering would occur as radicals waited for their role of truth to be acknowledged. In fact, Godwin does acknowledge the need for gradual reform:

> The complete reformation that is wanted, is not instant but future reformation. It can in reality scarcely be considered as of the nature of action. It consists in an universal illumination. Men feel their situation, and the restraints, that shackled them before, vanish like a mere deception. When the true crisis shall

108 *Letters and Essays*, p. 104.

> come, not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger to be lifted up. The adversaries will be too few and too feeble to dare to make a stand against the universal sense of mankind.
> Nor do these ideas imply, as at first sight they might seem to imply, that the revolution is at an immeasurable distance. (I, pp. 222-23)

Hays's writings will chart the progress of this waiting period, and more importantly the detrimental effects of it; effects which she rightly points out have been made worse by philosophy as both Emma and Mary both face the consequences of acting as if social reformation had already taken place. Instead of the vague possibilities inherent in both philosophies Hays wanted to comprehend perceived certainties.

It can be seen that Hays is utilizing the Helvetian philosophy in order to support her claims for female equality, and, at the same time, to help position her within a radical rhetoric which ultimately shared the same goals for a new, progressive, society. It was inconceivable that radicals, such as Godwin, would ignore the pernicious position of women, once the prejudice of their circumstances was exposed. If institution was erroneous, then the institution of womanhood also had to be removed. Failure to adapt to a rational discourse was not an indication of irrationality but, on the contrary, of the insidious workings of this institution which had denied women access to rationality. Attempts at fusing the two discourses led to failure. Circumstances had to be altered before the attempt could meet with success, and yet these circumstances had already shaped the female agent in terms of failure. Helvetius had made this failure a philosophically respectable outcome for women like Hays, and so her public avowal of him is an optimistic one. The 'nonsense' she contributed to the *Monthly Magazine* was the beginning of what was to become a careful defence of her own position.[109]

Hays keeps returning to the contrast between felt response and theory, relentlessly pointing out the gap between them which philosophy cannot bridge and for which the Godwinian philosophy cannot provide comfort. When confident, she is sceptical about his own beliefs:

> And you really think, or at least wish to persuade me, you think, that by sagely contemplating the effects of the passions, in mortals living in Greece and Rome, lord knows how long ago, we can annihilate our own, at present existing! How much further, on some occasions, does a little nature and experience go, than philosophy! (Letter 29).

This takes her back to her protestations about experience being the only basis for philosophy. Her writings place her adopted philosophy at the forefront of this confrontation precisely because the daily experience of the women radicals forced them to take the theoretical parameters to the limit and whilst Hays might have perceived herself

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109 According to Robert Southey, Hays 'sometimes writes nonsense there about Helvetius'. Quoted in J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Polite Marriage: Eighteenth-Century Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 179.

as a Godwinian 'failure' in that she was unable to make the necessary equation of happiness and 'general good', her writings show her consistent commitment to confront the inadequacies of such a way of thinking.

AFTERWORD ON GODWIN

Godwin had become the butt of much anti-Jacobin fervour, particularly for his attempt to impose rationalism so relentlessly on all aspects of daily life, an attempt which, as the Appendix of letters suggests, and as I am arguing, Hays felt to be incompatible with this daily life.

Major changes occur between the first and the second editions of *Political Justice,* as the Preface to the latter makes clear when Godwin talks about 'a severe and assiduous revisal'.[110] Most important for this study is the re-writing of Books One, Four and Eight, which introduce, or expand on, the subjects of self-love, benevolence, marriage, virtue and duty; all of which are included in the term 'domestic affections'. Because of the importance of the change in attitude I have quoted at length from Godwin's various apologetics. Commentators such as Mark Philp have seen these changes as 'concessions to new cultural experiences and a new language of expression',[111] so that by the time of the third edition in 1798 Godwin:

> abandons his earlier, essentially rationalist, terminology in favour of the language of empiricism and scepticism [...] Now it seems that Godwin's acquaintance with the British empiricists and their followers has led him to advance an epistemology in which reason and truth no longer have a central place. [...] Indeed Godwin's changed account of truth clearly related to his attempt to integrate feeling and emotion into his account of moral action.[112]

Significantly, Godwin made a change to the notorious example of disinterested benevolence when he appears as 'counsel for the Archbishop Fenelon versus my own mother, in the famous fire cause'.[113] By the second edition the roles of chambermaid as 'my wife, my mother or my benefactor' had been modified into 'a valet, my brother, my father or my benefactor'.

The preface to Godwin's novel *St Leon* (1799) reiterates his own vindication of his changes in emphasis and, of course, by this time Godwin had been an 'adviser' during the writing of *Memoirs,*[114] if not of *The Victim of Prejudice* :[115]

> Some readers of my graver productions will perhaps, in perusing these little volumes, accuse me of inconsistency; the affections and charities of private life

110 *Political Justice,* 2nd edn, p. xiii.
111 Philp, p. 166.
112 Godwin also admitted in the Preface to *St Leon* that 'for more than four years, I have been anxious for opportunity and leisure to modify some of the earlier chapters of that work [*Political Justice*] in conformity to the sentiments inculcated in this' (pp. ix-x).
113 Charles Lamb, quoted in Locke, p. 168.
114 See especially Letters 24, 25, 27, 30, 31.
115 See Letter 43.

> being every where in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favour. [...] I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them. True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments; for with them our minds are more thoroughly maintained in activity and life than they can be under the privation of them; and it is better that man should be a living being, than a stock or a stone. True virtue will sanction this recommendation; since it is the object of virtue to produce happiness, and since the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay, by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.[116]

In a memorandum of 1798, Godwin had already declared his intention to 'correct certain errors in *Political Justice*, one part of which is essentially defective, in the circumstance of not yielding a proper attention to the empire of feeling",[117] and in *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling*, written in 1805, Godwin 'turns to domestic life with new vigour'.[118] According to *Fleetwood's Mr Macneil* 'too much independence is not good for a man. It conduces neither to his virtue nor his happiness. The discipline which arises out of the domestic charities, has an admirable tendency to make man, individually considered, what man ought to be'.[119] Earlier Macneil had stated:

> Every man has in him the seeds of a good husband, a good father, and a sincere friend. You will say, perhaps, these are not sublime and magnificent virtues, yet, if each man were enabled to discharge these, the world upon the whole would afford a ravishing spectable. (p. 196)

This marriage of reason and affection is seen by Mark Philp as a logical recognition of two mutually dependent human qualities which Godwin now sought to harness onto his system of utility:

> although radicalism hardened its sentimental heritage and rejected the earlier excesses of sensibility in favour of rational sentiment, this did not involve the eradication of sentiment so much as its disciplining by reason. [...] Reason comes in to order this realm: it does not come in to destroy it.[120]

Godwin's relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft is often cited as a possible softening influence on the rigour of his philosophy, and was indeed declared as such by Godwin in

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116 Godwin, *St Leon*, pp. ix-x.
117 Quoted in Locke, p. 139.
118 B.J. Tysdahl, *William Godwin as Novelist* (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 98.
119 Godwin, *Fleetwood: or, the New Man of Feeling* rev edn (London: Bentley, 1832), p. 206.
120 Philp, p. 166.

his *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1798). In the second edition of the same year he evaluated their different approaches to the same 'truth' using terms which he had become familiar with in Hays's correspondence:

> Women have a frame of body more delicate and susceptible of impression than men, and, in proportion as they receive a less intellectual education, are more unreservedly under the empire of feeling. Feeling is liable to become a source of erroneous decisions, because a mind not accustomed to logical analysis, cannot be expected accurately to discriminate between the dictates of an ingenuous mind, and the factitious sentiments of a partial education. Habits of deduction enable us to correct this defect. But habits of deduction may generate habits of sophistry; and scepticism and discussion, while they undermine our prejudices, have sometimes a tendency to weaken or distort our feelings. Hence we infer one of the advantages accruing from the association of persons of an opposite sex: they may be expected to counteract the principal mistake into which either is in danger to fall.[121]

This is a large concession indeed. Now Godwin not only sees both extremes as errors, but also as leading to a diminution of character if only one is nurtured. Godwin held his wife responsible for this change in his thinking, stating that he admired her for 'the strength of her mind [which] lay in intuition', a commodity which Godwin now felt he 'wanted in this respect'.[122] Mark Philp takes this influence a stage further by locating these changes within 'the production and consumption of culture' itself as practised by 'such sturdy humanitarians' as Hays:

> Not only was there the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft, but Godwin also associated with other figures emerging in the literary world whose debt to sentiment, conditioned by a more Godwinian conception of virtue, is quite clear. Mary Hays and Mary Robinson provided two new venues and circles of acquaintance where such a perspective would certainly have been encouraged [...].[123]

For this study it is important to recognise the enormous significance of Godwin's change in outlook, precisely because its eventual manifestation, to a large extent, legitimates Hays's own radical activity and, hence, female utility, within the affections.

HAYS ON HELVETIUS AND GODWIN IN THE *MONTHLY MAGAZINE*

By the 1790s Hays had recognized in Helvetius, a philosophy with which to identify and used it as a way into polemical debate. In her first publication, *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792) in which she defends public worship, she makes her argument largely through an appeal to the influence of early associations and the force of habit. This publication, and *Letters and*

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121 *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Constable, 1928), pp. 130-31.
122 ibid., p. 125.
123 Philp, p. 217.

Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous, are treated more fully in chapter two on Dissent, but what is prominent in *Cursory Remarks* is her recognition of the place of 'outward and sensible impressions' which will lead 'to a truly rational pursuit of our real and ultimate good'.[124] Reliance on these impressions is necessary because 'our faculties [are] limited' although she optimistically looks forward to a 'future system, where our faculties will expand, neither bounded by time, nor darkened by frailty; [when] we shall, I trust, penetrate to the source of things, and become true philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard.'[125] Until such time we must depend on 'repeated impressions' producing 'good or evil habits'.[126] We are the creatures of sense impressions, and therefore, pliable beings, susceptible to influence. Of course, Helvetius did not invent sensationalism nor necessity. Hays was clearly seeking to grapple with terms which were to become by-words of the radicals, and of her own writing. This initial tendency to analyse and tease out philosophic terminology, was to continue, becoming less tentative and pedestrian as she utilized it to make sense of her own experience, especially in her novels and her correspondence with Godwin.

Thus, in her early writing, Hays had been already implicitly supporting a determinist and sensationalist outlook, but soon she considered herself a devotee of the French philosopher to the extent that she entered into printed debate in his defence in 1796, in the newly instigated *Monthly Magazine*, which had begun publication in February.[127] This liberal, and often controversial magazine, under the ownership of Richard Phillips, published a series of articles on educational development to which Hays is thought to have contributed as 'A Woman'.[128] It simultaneously carried a correspondence on the influence of Helvetius, to which Hays as 'M.H.' was a central contributor, although it was assumed that M.H. was a man.[129]

In the first number 'J.T.' questions Helvetius's ability to demonstrate 'that man is, in fact, nothing more than the product of his education' being 'perfectly convinced that he has produced no such demonstration', and refuting Helvetius's claim that 'chance' and 'accidental circumstances' (both of which could be brought under control) is to what

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124 *Cursory Remarks,* p. 12.
125 ibid., p. 20.
126 ibid.
127 It continued until 1824 and was 'the journal of the Dissenters, the Unitarians - radicals in religion and politics alike, believers in the March of Intellect towards the Reign of Mind', See Geoffrey Carnall 'The *Monthly Magazine*', *RES*, n.s. 5, 18 (1954), 158-64 (p. 158). For a more general discussion of Hays's contributions see Burton Pollin, 'Mary Hays on Women's Rights in the *Monthly Magazine*', *Etudes Anglaises*, 24 No 3, (1971), 271-82.
128 See Pollin. I agree with his assessment that 'the sentiments, style, and allusions to *'Political Justice* are characteristic of her work', p. 276, although I think he overlooks the direct influence of Helvetius in his article. The interest in Helvetius regarding women's position and the concluding reference in the November issue (1796) to the 'school of adversity' argument supports the assumption that these articles are by Hays. Where substantial quotations from the same number are being given page references will be placed in parenthesis in the test.
129 See August and September 1796 issues.

'illustrious characters' owe their emergence.[130] The controllable power of education and of environmental situation is what had produced Hays's Helvetian optimism and her faith ns improved education for women, and in June, in an article signed M.H. Hays launches an attack on J.T.'s strictures, which 'appear [...] very inconclusive, on the philosophy of the celebrated Helvetius',[131] claiming that 'every operation, whether mental or bodily, can only be performed with facility by exercise and habit'. M.H. reiterates Helvetius's sensationalist thinking in that 'Man is born, simply, a perceptive being, or a creature capable of receiving sensation. The nature of these sensations must depend upon the external circumstances by which he is surrounded'. Hays summons Helvetius to substantiate her claims that it is female circumstances, largely of education, which impede their moral and intellectual progress because 'all knowledge is conveyed through the medium of the senses; whether those senses shall be more or less acute depends perhaps [...] on the degree of excitement they have received, or in which they have been called into action, and sharpened by use'. She uses the opportunity of J.T.'s letter to put forward a philosophy which would vindicate female subservience and, in addition, offer the hope of future improvement. Consequently, she concludes that 'the notion of natural powers, aptitude and dispositions, has been productive of infinite mischief: it has a tendency to produce habits of indolence, despondency, and vicious indulgence' and, rather gratuitously, introduces Helvetian support for her 'school of adversity theory' that '"the brave and active conquer difficulties by daring to oppose them"' because 'our attainments will be in an exact proportion to our excitements'. She not only answers J.T. but seizes an opportunity to educate the reader in Helvetian thinking and several important features of which are stressed here which look forward to a more direct application in Hays's presentation of her heroines' experiences: sensations are dependent on circumstances and habit reinforces them.

In August J.T. challenges M.H. by claiming that 'nothing that is advanced by M.H. has in the least convinced me of the truth of the system of Helvetius'.[132] After refuting all of Hays's arguments he concludes 'I consider the system of Helvetius as a fanciful hypothesis, not supported by any proper or sufficient arguments, and repugnant to the general sentiments and experience of mankind' but he points out one reason for the apparent attraction of it: its foundation in paradox (p. 523).

The seductive quality of Helvetius's paradoxical reasoning was a feature Hays, herself, would be forced to confront later in her philosophical career largely through experience, whether her own or that of her heroines. However, at this stage, Hays is willing to produce a signed 'Defence of Helvetius' in January 1797,[133] which follows 'On the

130 *Monthly Magazine*, 1 (1796), pp. 26-9.
131 ibid., pp. 385-87.
132 *Monthly Magazine*, 2 (1796), pp. 521-23.
133 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 26-8.

Philosophy of Helvetius' by S.R. in the September issue, a weakly argued reply to 'a Correspondent, who signs himself M.H.'.[134] S.R.'s letter claims that 'the philosophy of Helvetius has become very fashionable in England. I, however, believe, that all arguments deduced from experience and analogy, are directly in opposition to it', and goes on to refute M.H.'s previous arguments. We can see that Hays was at the forefront of philosophical debate in the pages of this influential magazine and the concluding articles are directly produced, or provoked by Hays.

This 'defence' is a long and spirited summary of what Hays saw to be the main issues of the Helvetian doctrine, such as Helvetius's views on virtue and happiness, which she tends to quote rather than elaborate on. However, she seizes the opportunity of J.T.'s final challenge in order to concentrate on the radical Helvetius, who stressed the equality of powers, and hence the importance of circumstances, a position which was useful to Hays's simultaneous concern with female education and female capacities:

> "Let it not (says Helvetius) be supposed, that there is an extreme difference in the common organization of men. All have not the same ear; yet in a concert, at certain tunes, all the musicians, all the dancers in an opera, and all the soldiers of a battalion move equally in measure." It might not, perhaps, be impossible to prove, as before hinted, that even physical differences are an *effect* rather than a cause (p. 28).

Typically, she resorts to assertions but then she confusedly draws attention to the ambiguity of Helvetian thinking, concluding rather weakly that 'if the system of Helvetius be a fanciful and paradoxical hypothesis, unsupported by proper or sufficient argument, I confess, the objections which have hitherto been alleged against it, appear to me still more vague, unfounded, and hypothetical' (p. 28). J.T. would have none of this and offered a final 'Reply to M.H.' in the April 1797 issue, again claiming that 'he' has provided 'no proof of the truth of the system of Helvetius', rather, 'all is imagination, supposition, and conjecture'.[135]

Notwithstanding the importance to this study of recognising Hays's voice of debate regarding the centrality of Helvetius, it is equally important that we recognise the public use she makes of this debate in regard to her central issue of female circumstances and, running concurrently with this Helvetian debate, was a series of articles on 'Female Talents' to which Hays also contributed, either directly under her own name, or I believe as 'A Woman'.[136] In April 1796 'The Enquirer' explored the question '*Are Literary, and Scientific Pursuits suited to the Female Character?*'[137] opening a debate which offered 'A Woman' the opportunity in July to boldly and publicly question a situation whereby:

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134 *Monthly Magazine*, 2 (1796), p. 629.
135 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 265.
136 The interest in Helvetius regarding women's position and the concluding reference in the November issue to the 'school of adversity' issue suggests that these articles are by her.
137 *Monthly Magazine*, 1 (1796), pp. 181-84.

> one half of the human species, on a self-erected throne, should prescribe bounds to, and impose intellectual fetters on, the other half; and dictate to them to what purposes they are to apply, and how far they are to be allowed to exercise, their common faculties

which she finds to be 'not more intolerable than vain'.[138] She utilizes Helvetian sensationalism to act as a 'Defence of Female Talents', largely 'because the education of women has been uniformly more perverted, as well as neglected, than that of men' which vindicates 'their general inferiority', especially 'when education is comprehensively considered, as consisting of precept, accident, social intercourse, and political institution'. The result of this distorted education is that:

> 'woman, beginning so to feel her own dignity, and to assert the glorious privilege of thinking and reasoning, was to be flattered into the feeble imbecile creature which [...] has, in every age, corrupted, degraded, and, in her turn, tyrannized over her oppressor' (p. 470)

and this leads her to ask:

> When will the mists of prejudice be dispelled by the light of reason? When will a generous policy take place of partal institution? When shall we cease to be disgusted with unmeaning and ostentatious pretensions to liberality of sentiment; liberality which has hitherto been little more than a name? (p. 470)

By focusing on the future through the repetition of 'when' Hays shows that her major concern is with the present rather than with the future. Using Helvetius for her specific use and as her starting point, Hays is indirectly calling upon his non-discriminatory philosophy to foreground the absurdity of a position for woman which denotes inferiority. If Helvetian thinking is accepted then the inferior position of woman has to be an anomaly.

Continuing the debate in the November issue,[139] 'A Woman' argues that: 'There is, there can be, but one standard of truth and virtue, for every rational being: from arbitrary distinctions on these subjects, as from a poisoned source, the most pernicious evils which have afflicted and corrupted society, have flowed' (p. 785). Moreover, 'the uniform civil and social disadvantages under which women have hitherto laboured, sufficiently account for this seeming, or real, inferiority' (p. 786). Instead of this false position she urges 'scope wherein to exert and display our powers!' (p. 786).

Although these articles are outside the main 'Helvetian' debate, Hays continues to utilize Helvetius's arguments which can only favour female improvement. Nothing more appears until March 1797 when M.H. contributes 'to the strictures of A.B. and C' with

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138 *Monthly Magazine*, 2 (1796), pp. 469-70 (p. 469).

139 ibid., pp. 784-87. During this period articles on this topic appeared by 'C.D.' in August, pp. 526-67; 'Philogynes' in September, pp. 611-12; 'A.B.' in October, pp. 696-97.

'Improvements Suggested in Female Education',[140] arguing that 'female education, as at present conducted, is a complete system of artifice and despotism' to the extent that 'from woman, thus rendered systematically weak and powerless, to whom truth and morals have been confounded, inconsistent and contrary qualities are absurdly expected' (pp. 193-94). In other words, education as a circumstance and a cause necessitates that women remain in 'error'. In this article Hays as M.H. makes her central and controversial claim that 'sexual distinctions respecting chastity, an important branch of temperance, have served but to increase the tide of profligacy, and have been the fruitful source of the greater part of the infelicity and corruption of society' (p. 194). This argument will be discussed more fully in the chapter on *The Victim of Prejudice* but it is important that Hays is seen to include it within a public discussion of Helvetian circumstances, regretting that women 'are uniformly educated' for 'dependence', and ending on the plea that 'till one moral and mental standard is established for every rational agent, every member of a community, and a free scope afforded for the exertion of their faculties and talents, without distinction of rank or sex, virtue will be an empty name, and happiness elude our most anxious research' (p. 195). At this point it is important that the connection between circumstances, female virtue, and happiness, be seen. Virtue and happiness are key terms of the Godwinian philosophy and it is crucial that we recognise Hays's location of them within the sexual distinctions which Godwin's system ignores.

In May 1797 M.H. again corresponds in the same magazine on the subject 'Are Mental Talents productive of Happiness?', [141] in which, using a combination of Helvetian and Godwinian sentiments, she discusses such ponderables as the nature of virtue. The bulk of her letter paraphrases popular Helvetian and Godwinian principles so that the two discourses appear to be compatible, as if Godwin was still a follower of the Frenchman's beliefs. She claims:

> Virtue, it has been affirmed, is but a calculation of consequences, or a choice of the best means to attain a certain end, the ultimate benefit, or greater sum of enjoyment, suited to the perceptions and faculties of a rational and sensitive being. (p. 358)

In this article she simultaneously acknowledges the power of the passions and, importantly, the power of the passions under adversity, a Helvetian position which is crucial to an understanding of her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*:

> Misfortune and difficulty put the mind upon collecting its powers; the disappointment or the calamity which does not overwhelm and stupify, stimulates, awakens the stronger passions, sets the mind in motion, rouses those energies which, in the lap of indolence, had never existed. (p. 358)

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140 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 193-95.
141 ibid., pp. 358-60.

As we have seen, this relates directly to Helvetius's discrimination between capacities for 'genius' and 'indolence' but here Hays acknowledges the dangers involved in the passions because 'May not the victory cost us too dear? [...] Is a wise and tranquil old age worth the purchase of a youth of suffering, and a manhood of warfare? If this be the only method of generating talents, who would wish to purchase them, at a rate so expensive? [...] may not the mind be roused by means less violent and obnoxious?' (p. 358). However this might be, she also argues that pain is efficacious to 'the intellectual man' because 'he values himself on his capacity for emotions, which, while they rend, soften and humanize his spirit' (p. 359). We have to be prepared for error and failure because 'talents, however generated, appear to be simply the power, which proves beneficial or mischievous, as it is applied or directed'. However, she warns that such talents 'when pent up and oppressed, the whirlwind and the torrent are not more wild and destructive [...]' (p. 360).

In these *Monthly Magazine* articles Hays has chosen Helvetian arguments which substantiate her own experience as a woman. She proudly concluded this debate with a passage she attributed to Godwin's *Enquirer* by stressing that 'every attempt, however impotent, to investigate or elucidate the nature and history of mind, is laudable, and has a claim to indulgence; the desire of simplifying its operations, tracing their principles, and reducing them to general laws [...] is one of the grandest efforts of human reason' (p. 360).

Hays's interest in the passions recurs again in the July 1800 issue in 'Remarks on Dr Reid on Insanity',[142] a reply to Dr Reid's earlier 'Essay on Insanity' in the May and June issues.[143] In this letter, which she signs in full, she considers the psychological effects of exercising the passions in maniacal treatment, a topic which Godwin had also considered.[144] She partly supports his suggestion of combating habitual 'force with force, and passion by passion', because 'from the torrent sluiced into many channels, there is little dread of devastation' (p. 523), but her own fiction had chronicled such 'devastation' in the experience of Emma Courtney who was lacking in the opportunity of opposing 'passion by passion' because of the lack of acceptable passions available to women. This article provides Hays with a chance to re-establish her concern with female opportunity and to excuse her heroine's 'excess' by reiterating the debilitating association of 'passion' with 'habit'. Dr Reid helps her establish this tendency, however, 'Modern inquirers' have 'with greater acuteness and more sagacity, considered passion as a despot, in possession of power, deaf to the claims of justice, and blind to the splendour of truth' so that to repel 'passion by passion' would be dangerously founded on error rather than principle (p. 523). The use of 'justice' suggests that she has Godwin in mind here. She goes on to consider a

142 *Monthly Magazine*, 9 (1800), pp. 523-24.

143 ibid., pp. 342-45; 427-29. This is John Reid (1776 - 1822), a friend of Hays from Hackney Academy who, according to the *DNB* 'added nothing to medical knowledge' despite publishing *Essays on Insanity* (1816) and *Essays on Hypochondriasis and other Nervous Afflictions* (1821). See *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder, 1885), 47, p. 431.

144 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, pp. 81-3.

third, perhaps more personally attractive possibility: 'the complete gratification of the absorbing feeling', but, instead, Hays urges Dr Reid to consider the resultant weakening of the reason and the danger of producing inveterate habit, the relinquishment of which becomes 'most difficult and painful' (p. 524). The pleasure arising from such feeling quickly becomes subsumed by habit, hence problems arise when the 'object' of passion is removed but not the associative habit itself. This concurs entirely with her belief in the power of association and in causation. Inevitability of conduct is written into this belief. She is making a systematic exploration of the consequences of thwarted passions, consequences which might lead to madness. In her own experience her potential for good through her passion for love had been diverted from its source, firstly through the death of John Eccles, and secondly through the rejection of Frend; 'devastation' had to be the result because of the influence of associative 'reiteration and habit'.

Hays returns to the anti-Helvetian idea that a multiplicity of passions produces balance and well-being. Instead of encouraging a particular passion she urges, with Dr Reid, the promotion of a varied existence so that 'passion, whether morbid or mental, is checked and diverted even by the efforts used for its restraint' (p. 524). However, as Hays's earlier correspondence has shown, it was difficult for women to have access to such variety, firstly because their education prepared them for a restricted life largely in pursuit of love, and secondly because their social situation denied them the opportunity for exploring the range of options open to men.

As we can see, Hays utilized the *Monthly Magazine* to think through her position regarding Helvetius and Godwin. More importantly, it offered her a platform for voicing this position. The regularity of articles specifically on Helvetius, and more generally on women's issues, testifies to the interest shown in both, and demonstrates how Hays was at the forefront of informed debate on philosophical issues. As her contributions to the two concurrent series of articles suggests, Hays clearly saw an inter-relationship between her adopted philosophy and the position of women, an inter-relationship which her novels would explore more fully through the interrogation of her heroines' experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEMOIRS OF EMMA COURTNEY: OR, THE VICTIM OF PHILOSOPHY[1]

> My aim was merely to shew, and I searched into my own heart for the model, the possible effects of the present system of things, and the contradictory principles which have bewilder'd mankind, upon private character, and private happiness. (Letter 31)
>
> How much better would it be if [...] every man were to make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?[2]

Anti-Jacobin novels quickly emerged out of a mood which E.P. Thompson was later to describe as 'star-struck' and 'messianic'.[3] Godwin became the butt of innumerable satirical novels which sought to re-establish a recognition of daily limitations and human possibilities. For instance, George Walker's *The Vagabond* (1799) had been written 'with a desire of placing, in a practical light, some of the prominent absurdities of many self-important reformers of mankind, who, having heated their imagination, sit down to write political romances, which never were, and never will be, practical'.[4] The reviewer goes on to conclude that 'the writer claims some praise for having exhibited the dangers of the new philosophy'. My argument is that Hays had already contributed to, if not even initiated, this trend in her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney.*

Hays enjoys the dubious distinction of becoming notorious as the caricature of herself, a caricature which she seemed so ready to donate to her enemies. However, I shall argue that the anti-Jacobin presentation of her is, ironically, and precisely, inapt because the opinions lampooned are often the very ones she herself challenged through her own writings. This reading makes a mockery of such presentations of her as Gertrude Sinclair in Charles Lloyd's *Edmund Oliver* (1798), and as Bridgetina Botherim in Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). According to the Advertisement to *Edmund Oliver* Lloyd had wanted, in the character of Lady Gertrude, 'to portray a woman of warm affections, strong passions, and energetic intellect, yielding herself to these loose and declamatory principles, yet at the same time uncorrupted in her intentions, unfortunate from error, and not from deliberate vice'.[5] This sounds like the same kind of Helvetian justification of error which I shall argue Hays was employing in *Memoirs.*

In contrast, in Hamilton's novel, Bridgetina Botherim's counter-reformatory function is made clear from the outset as being 'an excellent antidote to the poison' of the 'ridiculous

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1 I have used the first edition published by Robinson in 1796 and page references are given in parenthesis in the text.

2 *Political Justice*, I, p. 240.

3 *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 109.

4 Quoted in *Critical Review*, n.s. 26 (1799), p. 237. For accounts of Godwin's 'appearances' in novels see Ford K. Brown, *The Life of William Godwin* (London: Dent, 1926) and Don Locke, *A Fantasy of Reason.*

5 I, pp. ix-x.

point of view [...] of philosophical novels'.[6] I think that Hamilton misses Hays's point entirely by presenting Bridgetina's misunderstood sophistry and dependence on direct quotes from *Political Justice* as a straightforward echoing of Godwin's opinions, whereas my argument is that Emma Courtney was deliberately echoing them in order to undermine them. I believe that Hays was just as aware of the gap between philosophical discourse and daily experience as were the anti-Jacobin critics, who had failed to see her novels within this context of confrontation. This ambivalent relationship with the Godwinian movement she sought to adopt is one which she systematically explores in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. However, she does this by using the technique we explored in chapter one: the use of authoritative voices, as supplied by Helvetius and, ironically, by Godwin himself.

Janet Todd suggests that 'until its sensational end' the plot of *Memoirs* is 'simple'.[7] However, if read within its philosophical framework, Emma's memoirs are far from simple, being more of a complex undermining of the discourse they purport to support and, within this context, the plot also becomes complicated and manipulated to coincide with the claims of the opening quotation of this chapter so that the heroine's apparently confused actions are to be seen as a reflection of the 'present system of things'. Janet Todd goes on to suggest such an engagement when she claims that 'the effect of the book is far from cautionary' because, although 'Emma's errors certainly deserve that name if the reader attends to the plot, [...] the perspective throughout is dangerously the heroine's and she is as likely to glory in as to denigrate her sensibility'.[8] Whilst I agree with this conclusion I would like to extend it to consider how it is precisely her philosophical engagement which produces this contradictory effect so that not only is the heroine's sensibility excused but also her actions within the plot are vindicated as excusable and even laudatory. I am giving quite a full account of the plot as I think it is essential that it is examined later within the context of how the reader is encouraged to interpret it.

The motherless Emma Courtney is brought up by her aunt and uncle, Mr and Mrs Melmoth who enjoy an idyllic marriage in which 'the hours fled on downy pinions' (I, p. 13). On the death of her uncle Emma's father insists on her visiting him once a week as part of his plan to 'prepare and strengthen my mind to encounter, with fortitude, some hardships and rude shocks, to which I might be exposed' and as an antidote to 'a sensibility, which he already perceived, with regret, was but too acute' (I, p. 28). The narrator, Emma, deems it essential to relate to the recipient of her memoirs (the son of her beloved) the details of her history in order for him to trace the 'development of my own particular character' (I, p. 14). Hence, she reveals the stages which she designates as important or traumatic in her early life. All of these focus on separation and loss, firstly when sent to a wetnurse; secondly, on removal to a boarding school which she sees in

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6 I, p.xvi.

7 Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, p. 241.

8 ibid., p. 242.

terms of 'exile from all I loved' and as her 'prison' (I, p. 23); thirdly, as a result of the premature death of her guardian uncle; fourthly, after the death of her aunt 'this tender monitor' (I, p. 43), when Emma was just 18; fifthly, the death of her own father which occasioned her recognition of her imprisonment 'within a magic circle' of 'dependence' and its attendant 'cruel prejudices' (I, pp. 54-5). Such prejudices focus on peculiarly female circumstances as Emma exclaims:

> Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamantine chain? (I, p. 55)[9]

Emma is to be taken into an uncle's, Mr Morton's care, at Morton Park where she meets Mr Montague, her eventual husband and the Godwinian figure Mr Francis, 'his eye piercing, and his manner impressive' (I, p. 60), with whom she begs to correspond on his departure. During her residence with the Mortons Emma meets the widow Mrs Harley with whom she becomes intimately acquainted and with whose absent son, Augustus, she falls in love, exulting in him as the 'St Preux, the Emilius of my sleeping and waking reveries' (I, p. 113). Even without the benefit of hindsight Emma is prepared to spend time on 'self-examination' which compelled her to acknowledge:

> that solitude, the absence of other impressions, the previous circumstances that had operated on my character, my friendship for Mrs Harley, and her eloquent, affectionate, reiterated praises of her son, had combined to awaken all the exquisite, though dormant, sensibilities of my nature. (I, p. 115)

Emma rejects the marriage proposal of Mr Montague and, realizing the excess of her ardor for the unseen son, secludes herself at Morton Park 'fostering the sickly sensibility of my soul, and nursing wild, improbable, chimerical, visions of felicity, that, touched by the sober wand of truth, would have "melted into thin air"' (I, pp. 117-18).

The narrative now accelerates with Mrs Harley falling ill, Emma and Mr Montague's chaise crashing on the way to visit her, and their rescue by the still unknown Augustus Harley himself, his consequent illness during which Emma 'clasped the stranger to [...her] throbbing bosom' (I, p. 127) before discovering that he was the object of her desire:

> what were my emotions, on tracing the beloved features of Augustus Harley! [...] A universal trembling seized me. I hastened out of the apartment with tottering steps, and shutting myself into my chamber, a tide of melancholy emotions, gushed upon my heart. I wept, without knowing wherefore, tears half delicious, half agonizing! (I, p. 130)

Emma subsequently falls in love with the actual Augustus, whose avowals of gratitude spur on her feelings: 'Ah! why did I misconstrue these emotions, so natural in such circumstances - why did I flatter my heart with the belief of a sympathy which did not, could not, exist!' (I, p. 131). Augustus's deathbed confession of a reciprocated love lends

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9 See chapter five where such an assertion is seen to question the very basis of femininity as proclaimed by conduct-books.

support to Emma's trust in her own ability to enter into a sympathetic engagement with him. It is some time before the reader is given the reason why Augustus cannot return Emma's love, and until he declares that he is already secretly married, she pursues his affections, offers herself physically to him and demands that he sees the 'injustice' of his rejection of her. Turned out of Morton Park for her apparent liaison with Augustus she resides with the Harleys where she 'imbibed, in large draughts, the deceitful poison of hope' (I, p. 147). Mr Montague repeats his protestations of love which are rejected and he leaves '*as a friend*' (I, p. 152). Emma seeks solace for the apparent rejection of her love and also an opportunity to rationalize her position in a correspondence with Mr Francis. She welcomes 'the idea of change, of exertion, of new scenes' at the home of a cousin in London where she also instructs girls 'in various branches of education' (I, p. 184).

Volume two recounts firstly Emma's acceptance of Augustus's rejection, then her hope of counteracting this, as Augustus refuses to clarify his opposition to the match and equivocates over his true feelings. Their largely one-sided correspondence charts Emma's growing awareness that his rejection of her love prevents her enjoying a productive, useful life and explores the pernicious consequences of her dependence on early associations and on the education which has made her perceive such love as the only fulfilment for her. Although she laments her dependence on irrational female pursuits she is a 'reasoning maniac' who can perceive the tight hold her female education has exerted over her present and her future. It is now that Emma learns that Augustus had married a foreigner three years previously and would forfeit his inheritance if this became known. She is shocked to find that she 'had been unconsciously, and perseveringly' exerting herself 'to seduce the affections of a *husband* from his *wife*' (II, p. 91).

Returning in sickness to Mrs Harley's own deathbed she again meets Augustus who accuses her of only respecting her own feelings and again coldly rejects her. She returns to London reluctantly under the protection of her would-be lover, Montague, to find that her 'mentor' Mr Francis had left England. She 'seemed, as if in an immense desart, a solitary outcast from society', experiencing 'the degradation of servitude' (II, pp. 148-49). Resourcefully, she decides to invest her income by purchasing an annuity, but the banking-house fails and Emma becomes more dependent on Montague who again offers to be 'your friend - your guardian - [...] *your husband*!' (II, p. 157). After a 'long contest, my desolate situation, added to the persevering affection of this enthusiastic young man, prevailed over my objections' and they marry (II, p. 159). Emma, 'ever thirsting after knowledge' took up the study of 'physic, anatomy, and surgery, with the various branches of science connected with them' thus becoming 'essentially serviceable' to her medical husband whom she now calls friend. As Emma is recovering from the birth of a daughter, Augustus reappears in her life as the result of a riding accident in passing through the town, and, in the absence of her husband, Emma nurses him until his death which takes place

after she has agreed to adopt his son Augustus. In terms reminiscent of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* he declares:

> "Surely [...] I have sufficiently fulfilled the dictates of a rigid honour! - In these last moments - when every earthly tie is dissolving - when human institutions fade before my sight - I may, without a crime, tell you —*that I have loved you.* —Your tenderness early penetrated my heart - aware of its weakness - I sought to shun you - I imposed on myself those severe laws of which you causelessly complained. - Had my conduct been less rigid, I had been lost - I had been unjust to the bonds which I had voluntarily contracted; and which, therefore, had on me indispensible claims. I acted from good motives, but no doubt, was guilty of some errors - yet, my conflicts were, even, more cruel than yours - I had not only to contend against my own sensibility, but against yours also. The fire which is pent up burns the fiercest!"—. (II, pp. 181-82)

The narrative ends dramatically with the illness of Emma, the seduction by Montague of a servant, the birth and murder of the resultant child, the suicide of Montague, and the devotion of Emma to the two children, and the death of the daughter at fourteen. Finally, in an extravagant appeal to the addressee of her memoirs, Emma again vindicates their writing: 'I have unfolded the errors of my past life - I have traced them to their source - I have laid bare my mind before you, that the experiments which have been made upon it may be beneficial to yours!' (II, pp. 217-18), thus reminding the reader of the initial occasion for the recounting: the young Augustus's attachment to an unobtainable woman, or 'object' of happiness. As we have seen, this confessional framework fits within both Dissenting and radical traditions, but it also satisifies the demands of the 'anti-sensibility' novel in that Emma is indeed punished for her 'ardent excesses of a generous mind' (I, p. 6).

However, careful reading of the Preface reveals how Hays had tried to prepare the reader for an ambivalent approach to her text as she foregrounds the role of the philosopher/novelist in 'delineating the progress, and tracing the consequences, of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice' (I, p. 5). But according to Helvetius passions are not prejudices, it is misunderstanding which distorts their benefits into a semblance of error or prejudice, or their mishandling which diverts them into these prejudices. In themselves they are praiseworthy. This is immediately followed by an instructive hint in the form of a quotation from Helvetius that "'Understanding, and talents [...are] nothing more, in men, than the produce of their desires, and particular situations"'. Also in this Preface, Hays draws on the tradition of writing which includes Ann Radcliffe's 'passion of terror' and *Caleb Williams*'s preoccupation with 'curiosity' and 'reputation' as 'ruling passions' (I, p. 6). I shall argue that, within the context of my earlier discussion of the passions in chapter three, Hays is making a plea that her heroine will be found to be similarly as excusable as Godwin's own Falkland, whom she elsewhere claims to be 'the best illustration of what I mean to inculcate' in his exemplification of the effects of 'the predominance of one strong, habitual, and fostered prejudice, [so that] the finest qualities are perverted, and the most

fatal calamities involved'.[10] By going on to specify that her own subject will be 'a sentiment hackneyed in this species of writing', love, she is demanding that the reader be as sympathetic with her heroine's motivations and actions as s/he would be with the 'terror' and 'reputation' already treated by two authors who had achieved a respectable, literary status. As we saw in chapter three, Helvetius could provide Hays with the means to insist that her novel's subject is comparable to Godwin's because both of them are focusing on the philosophical obsession with calculating 'the powers of the human mind' and learning 'the springs which set it in motion' (I, p. 5). Without making direct reference to Helvetius, Hays is appealing for a sympathetic reading of her heroine's 'errors'; errors which as Helvetius substantiates, are based on an ability to attempt to gain 'genius' status:

> The philosopher - who is not ignorant, that light and shade are more powerfully contrasted in minds rising above the common level; that, as rank weeds take strong root in a fertile soil, vigorous powers not unfrequently produce fatal mistakes and pernicious exertions; that character is the produce of a lively and constant affection - may, possibly, discover in these Memoirs traces of reflection, and of some attention to the phenomena of the human mind. (I, pp. 8-9)

I would contend, then, that Hays is immediately beginning her narrative on a note of confrontation by challenging the reader (and the first one was Godwin in his mentor capacity) to minimise the importance of her subject matter.[11] I would suggest, therefore, that Hays was beginning to find her own voice through direct challenge of other, more established ones, and in the case of *Memoirs*, of Godwin's, albeit through the use of another authoritative one, that of Helvetius. *Memoirs*, then, becomes a strange mixture of discourses as Hays tries to assert and subvert at the same time. Pamela Clemit's recent and interesting study of the Godwinian novel usefully discusses how *Caleb Williams* set up 'its own framework for debate' but, although Hays refers back to Godwin's novel as a point of reference, she does so in order to subvert it as a model rather than to emulate it.[12] It is essential for Hays to focus her philosophical findings on a specifically female situation and so the 'courtship plot' which is 'rejected' by Godwin 'in favour of a tale based on flight and pursuit'[13] comes to the fore although in inverted form in *Memoirs*. The courtship plot becomes the vehicle for an investigation of injustice and oppression itself.

This position is further complicated when she appears to adopt an attitude of apology towards her subject matter. Because Hays is determined to make use of the already established framework of the anti-sensibility novel and project a tone of apology and excuse by emphasising her heroine's 'errors', and present her as a human being 'liable to

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10 *Monthly Magazine*, 4 (1797), p. 181.

11 At this same time Hays was challenging Godwin's similar marginalizing of love in her letters to him. See especially Letter 22.

12 *The Godwinian Novel*, p. 2. See also Kenneth Moler *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), chapter six, for a discussion of the use made of the model of *Political Justice* during this period.

13 ibid., p. 6.

the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature', she appears to support her own claim that her heroine's behaviour is to 'operate as a *warning*, rather than as an example' (I, p. 8). This warning strategy is further demonstrated in the opening letter to Augustus's son when Emma exhorts him to 'Learn, then, from the incidents of my life [...] a more striking and affecting lesson than abstract philosophy can ever afford' (I, pp. 6-7) and is continued in the final letter when Emma hopes that unfolding 'the errors of my past life' will benefit the young man's mind (II, p. 217). All of this is, I would suggest, merely paying lip-service to a tradition of novel-writing which denied her access to a confrontation of a more direct kind. But, tellingly, despite such an avowal of intention on the part of the narrator of these 'errors', Hays still felt it necessary to reiterate this apparently unequivocal reading three years later when she ironically refers to the public's misinterpretation of *Memoirs*:

> I endeavoured to inculcate an important lesson, by exemplifying the errors of sensibility, or the pernicious consequences of indulged passion, even in a mind of no common worth and powers. To avoid, as I conceived, the possibility of misconstruction, I spoke of my heroine, in the preface, not as an example, but as a warning: yet the cry of slander was raised against me; I was accused of recommending those excesses, of which I laboured to paint the disastrous effects.[14]

Two things are happening here. What Hays does not suggest in this declaration of intent is that the 'disastrous effects' might, for an alert reader, produce a sub-text for examination of the limitations which make these 'effects' inevitably 'disastrous' in the first place. Moreover, by subtly implanting her heroine's behaviour within the Helvetian perspective which she consistently foregrounds through quotations,[15] she is actually removing the need for such an apology, as Emma's attempt to achieve the goal of 'general utility' is seen to be thwarted not because she is a bad Godwinian, but because Augustus is. Despite Hays's repeated rebuttal of any such intention, the fact remains that if *Memoirs* is read within the context of Hays's engagement with Helvetius (which careful reading of the text makes clear), then the novel may be read as an implicit criticism of a system which stands in the way of the heroine's attainment of her desires, desires which, in Godwinian terms of progress, could only be accommodated within a <u>future</u> system of things, if at all. Therefore, I think that Hays is not only 'condoning the state of mind she describes' as many have considered at the time and subsequently,[16] but using that state of mind in order to challenge the less accommodating way of thinking put forward by Godwin in the form of Mr Francis. The radical novel's duty to explore an individual's 'errors' is turned against itself by allowing Hays to transform these same errors into Helvetian signs of success. Most reviewers took this warning perspective at face value, praising its depiction of 'the dangerous consequences' resultant on an 'early unrestrained indulgence' of an 'ill-fated

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14 *The Victim of Prejudice*, p. 1.

15 See I, p. 5; I, p. 118; II, p. 87; II, p. 150.

16 Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 318.

passion',[17] and its exploration of 'the danger of indulging extreme sensibility',[18] and I shall later argue that this is because they were overlooking Hays's playful engagement with the novelistic tradition which her novel appeared to join.

Just as Dissenting ministers were encouraging their followers to analyze, dissect, interrogate their experience, so radical novelists were similarly concerned to do this even if this experience was based on 'mistakes, and miseries' (Letter 20). The exercise could not be philosophically useless because as Hays pointed out:

> Every writer who advances principles, whether true or false, that have a tendency to set the mind in motion, does good. Innumerable mistakes have been made, both moral and philosophical:- while covered with a sacred and mysterious veil, how are they to be detected? From various combinations and multiplied experiments, truth, only, can result. (I, pp. 6-7)

This concurs with Helvetius's insistence on the usefulness of mistakes but, as we have seen in chapter three, Helvetius largely does away with a need for any apology for them because of his emphasis on the attempt rather than on the outcome. An ability to take the risk of rejection is indicative of Emma's responsive nature: 'the wild career of energetic feeling' which is based on both 'hope and terror' (I, p. 43). This would account for misreadings of the novel because the reader becomes sympathetic towards the exhilaration offered by Emma's relentless attempts to gain her desires. The reader also, perhaps, is more interested in daily 'incidents of my life' than in 'abstract philosophy' (I, pp. 6-7).

Hays later offered her literary manifesto in her article 'On Novel Writing' in the *Monthly Magazine*, when she argued that:

> The business of familiar narrative should be to describe life and manners in real or probable situations, to delineate the human mind in its endless varieties, to develope the heart, to paint the passions, to trace the springs of action, to interest the imagination, exercise the affections, and awaken the powers of the mind. A good novel ought to be subservient to the purpose of truth and philosophy.[19]

On the latter grounds, Hays could exult in *Memoirs* and she could also take comfort in the fictional exposure of her error, as it would satisfy radical concern with the knowledge to be gained and, simultaneously, enable Hays to explore, yet again, through the confessional novel, the parameters of the philosophy which contained a radical need to 'trace the springs of action'.[20] In this way Hays, could both indulge and deny her retention of a discourse which was proving to be rationally and experientially unacceptable. I argue that *Memoirs* provides a more systematic exploration of the philosophical issues which Hays had been raising in her correspondence with Godwin and that the form itself was able to offer Hays

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17 *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 174-78 (p. 174).
18 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 47.
19 *Monthly Magazine*, 4 (1797), pp. 180-81 (p. 181).
20 ibid.

the comfort of the 'warning' function articulated by her heroine which was so painfully denied to Hays in real life.

Hays had been clear about this perspective when she told Godwin that she had asked Frend to return her letters as she wished to:

> employ myself in a work of fiction, to engage my mind, to sluice off its impressions [because] a philosophical delineation of the errors of passion, of the mischiefs of yeilding [sic] to the illusions of the imagination, might be useful. (Letter 20)

Even before her instructional preface she had prepared the reader to expect a particular perspective through the novel's epigraph, which was written by Rousseau, and which focused on what was common experience for many women in the eighteenth century:

> The perceptions of persons in retirement are very different from those of people of the great world: their passions, being differently modified, are differently expressed; their imaginations, constantly impressed by the same objects, are more violently affected. The same small number of images continually return, mix with every idea, and create those strange and false notions, so remarkable in people who spend their lives in solitude.[21]

Whilst, perhaps not living in the solitude so described, Hays repeatedly appeals for a recognition of the narrow circumstances which women experienced, comparing them with the wider opportunities available to men, a situation which demands to be considered within the context of Godwinian 'justice' and 'independence'.[22]

Hence, before her novel begins, Hays is offering an excuse for, and inviting sympathy for, her heroine's forthcoming behaviour, and apparently asking the reader to respond to the narrative within this framework of apology. The heroine's 'mistakes' are to be considered within the context of her circumstance of isolation and consequent impressionability. A philosophical excuse, grounded in Helvetius but also acceptable to Godwin, is immediately available, by means of the shaping power of circumstance. By utilizing Rousseau's generalization right at the beginning of her own discourse, Hays ensures that, although these are the memoirs of a specific character, Emma Courtney, they also take on a more representative role for 'persons in retirement'. Through her heroine's experience Hays simultaneously suggests that the 'remarkable' behaviour of women who also experience 'the same small number of images' may be excused.

This consideration of limited experience also reinforces her wish to explore the 'more universal sentiment' of love (I, p. 6) because of its centrality in the education of women. Helvetius supports her choice of subject because it as an example of a 'strong passion', whilst the tradition of the romantic and sentimental novel helps her counteract Godwin's insistence on the ascendancy of 'general' and 'disinterested' relationships with 'individual' attachments. I am suggesting then, that Hays is utilizing a novelistic cliché in the framework of apologetic warning in order to challenge it and Hays provides sufficient clues

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21 Title page of the first edition.

22 See especially Letter 7.

to deter the 'feeling and the thinking few' (I, p. 11) from taking this 'official' voice of warning too seriously. As early as the Preface Hays invites 'those readers, who feel inclined to judge with severity the extravagance and eccentricity of her [Emma's] conduct' to 'soften the asperity of their censures' (p. 8). But Hays immediately goes on to introduce the Helvetian context of 'vigorous powers not unfrequently' producing 'fatal mistakes and pernicious exertions'. As chapter three has shown, Helvetius simultaneously stressed that it is 'circumstances' or 'chance' (to which Emma refers on pp. 4-5) which encourages behaviour to be seen as erroneous. Moreover, in view of the serious intentions which are outlined in the Preface which invite the reader to re-assess the effects of indulging in excessive sensibility, which is made a convenient excuse for the heroine's subsequent erroneous behaviour, it seems rather strange that Hays should then draw upon this tradition of sensibility to provide a framework for this behaviour to be evaluated and, whilst not suggesting that *Memoirs* should be read as a piece of sustained irony, nevertheless, the very use of the characters' names foregrounds the author's playful engagement with the subject she is obliged to reject. She is not just apparently interrogating her heroine's sensibility (a sensibility fully vindicated by Helvetius) but also examining it as a novelistic convention. She does this by making suggestive links between her heroine's circumstances and the tradition of novels of sensibility. There is such a link between Emma's surname Courtney and that of her aunt and uncle, Melmoth. The novelist Courtney Melmoth was a popular writer of novels of sensibility, who preferred 'naked candour', and whose *Emma Corbett* (1780) opens 'with a letter, couched in the simple, energetic style' of which Emma Courtney's correspondence with Augustus Harley would seem to be an echo.[23] *Emma Corbett* also contains a character Sir Robert Raymond who 'has seen Emma's valiant struggles with her fate, her long misery and her short happiness'.[24] The name of Hays's hero, Augustus Harley, resonates with the sensibility of the 'man of feeling' himself.[25] Mr Montague might be suggestive of Frances Brooke's *Emily Montague* (1769) which claims that:

> women are religious as they are virtuous, less from principles founded on reasoning and argument, than from elegance of mind, delicacy of moral taste, and a certain quick perception of the beautiful and becoming in everything. This instinct, however, for such it is, is worth all the tedious reasonings of the men.[26]

In the same novel, sensibility is proclaimed to be 'the magnet which attracts all to itself' and although 'virtue may command esteem, understanding and talents admiration, beauty a

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23 Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 366. Courtney Melmoth was the pseudonym of S.J. Pratt.

24 ibid., p. 74.

25 *The Man of Feeling* (1771) by Henry Mackenzie has been seen as the epitome of the sentimental novel. Also Elizabeth Griffith wrote an epistolary novel *The Story of Lady Juliana Hartley* (1776) which extols sensibility.

26 Quoted in Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 94.

transient desire [...] 'tis sensibility alone which inspires love'.[27] In *Memoirs* it is love which becomes the location for desire and philosophical engagement to converge and I think that this playfully ironic framework helps the reader be more aware of the difficulties Hays was experiencing in such a convergence. Again, one senses that Hays needed to promote her own writing within a tradition, however this tradition, by subtly being transformed into an ironic perspective, enables her to question the reasoning which made its decline essential.

What is emerging is a complex text which engages directly and indirectly with other writings in order to enable Hays to foreground her heroine's errors as emerging out of sensibility, appear to reject it as leading to these errors, but at the same time ironically retain it as worth examining in more positive terms. This would help explain the ambiguous reactions to Emma's presentation. After what I consider to be such a systematic preparation of instructional 'clues' Hays now moves on to a more specifically directed attack: that of Godwinian thinking by ironic utilization of his own discourse in what has been seen as the 'case of Godwin vs. Godwin'.[28]

By referring to chapter three we can see how much Emma's dilemma is due to an assumption that she is living in a reciprocal state of Godwinian 'sincerity' but, because she is moving too fast into radical progress, she experiences the effects of the hiatus caused by the philosophy's failure to be operative. *Political Justice*'s terms demand that the success of its principles depends on society being able to rely on it being up and running before it can be fully tested. Emma is anticipating such a time but the philosophy's chief exponent, Mr Francis, could provide her with no comfort for being ahead of it. Emma is seen to suffer directly as a consequence of this failure, Augustus being the vehicle to expose this philosophical inadequacy. Whereas Hays had insisted that her heroine was to be seen as a 'warning', it is Augustus who might be seen as a warning against being insincere, being uncommunicative and being unresponsive. It is he who warns the reader of the consequences of trusting too much and of being a radical too soon. In other words, he is the means of exposing the inadequacies of the philosophy which Emma enthusiastically adopts. When Emma taunts Augustus with his failure to respond she does so in terms which signify that it is Godwinian thinking which is being cross-examined and found wanting. She chooses the philosophical terms of 'sincerity', 'disinterest', 'utility', 'virtue', and so on, to rebuke him with his lack of philosophical conviction, a conviction upon which her own 'sincerity', 'disinterest', 'utility' and, indeed, 'virtue' depend.[29]

Read in this way, when Emma bemoans Augustus's inability to state unequivocally the reasons why he will not marry her, she is questioning his Godwinian 'sincerity' and

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27 ibid., p. 97.

28 See Lois Whitney, *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), p. 248.

29 See for instance, the use made of these terms on pages II, p. 73; II, p. 16; II, p. 91; II, p. 21 et al.

'candour'. At the beginning of her narrative Emma refers to an 'incessant conflict between truth and error' and to practising 'the disingenuousness, by which my peace has been blasted' (I, p. 2). Throughout the unfolding of her narrative she has begged Augustus to 'learn the value of *unequivocal sincerity*!' (I, p. 74). Augustus's equivocations, delays and untruths are a direct repudiation of Godwin's principle that 'all that is necessary is, that I should practise no concealment [...] that I should have no secrets or reserves, but be always ready to return a frank and explicit answer'.[30] Too late, when she has perceived that Augustus was not worthy of her trust in his sincerity, she cries that '*truth* and *certainty* would, long ere this' have caused her 'not common feelings' to 'subside into their accustomed channels' (II, p. 58) as Helvetius could confirm.

At the same time, Emma insists that her love for Augustus had become 'disinterested' and this is supported by her having fallen in love with him as 'an ideal object [...] with a tender and fervent excess' which she foresaw might involve 'all my future usefulness and welfare' and, she might have added, happiness. All this, even before they met, because it 'was the magnanimity of your conduct, it was your virtues, that first excited my admiration and esteem'.[31] Emma points this out to Augustus when she tells him:

> I loved you, first, for what, I conceived, high qualities of mind - from nature and association, my tenderness became personal - till at length, I loved you, not only rationally and tenderly - *but passionately* - it became a pervading and a devouring fire!. (II, pp. 76-7)

By the repetition of 'became' it is clear that Emma's affection had its roots in disinterested recognition of virtue. Gary Kelly points out that in *Memoirs* 'moral attachment leads to sexual desire, the mind affects the body, in the erotic ideology of the political and cultural avant-garde of the 1790s', but I would argue that exploration of the political landscape is specifically focused on the philosophic foundation of these politics.[32]

The circumstance of her isolated and peculiarly female situation exacerbated her dependence on a 'new *brother*', 'a preceptor' a 'fraternal relation' which 'assisted me in deceiving myself' (I, pp. 138-39). Using terms which echo Rousseau's epigram she appeals for the combination of circumstances and a 'philosophic mind' to be recognised with its attendant implications:

> Cut off from the society of mankind, and unable to expound my sensations, all the strong affections of my soul seemed concentrated to a single point. Without being conscious of it myself, my grateful love for Mrs Harley had, already, by a transition easy to be traced by a philosophic mind, transferred itself to her son. (I, p. 113)

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30 *Political Justice*, I, p. 279.

31 The *Critical Review* n.s. 19 (1797), pp. 109-11 (p. 110) referred to this love being not 'at *first sight*, but even *before* first sight' a situation which might 'appear to savour of extravagance' and 'produce eccentricity of character and conduct' but urged the reader to remember that Emma's 'errors' arose out of 'extreme sensibility' and as the result of an *hazardous* experiment'.

32 *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827*, p. 99.

His mother, she suggests, had helped to elevate him in her mind into a desirable, because worthy, 'ideal object' (I, p. 116) through which Emma, possessor of such a 'philosophic mind', was able to perceive the ultimate fulfilment of her desire for happiness 'the only true *end* of existence' (II, p. 50). It is appropriate that her '*desire of being beloved,* of inspiring sympathy' (I, pp. 154-55) coincided with her pursuit of radical utility. Letter 23 clarifies this conflation when Hays claims in Letter 23 that 'in vain you will exhort mankind to self-oblivion till you have first convinced them, that duties and pleasures are comparable, great exhertions [sic] can only be produced by strong motives, you must begin by making it our interest to be virtuous, before virtue can become disinterested'. This is a classic example of where Helvetian and Godwinian thinking confront each other as self-interest conflates with disinterest.[33] In retrospect, she became able to separate her desire from her philosophic ideals as she recognised her ability to elevate the latter above the former: 'Having then examined my heart, attentively and deliberately, I suspect that I have been unjust to myself, in supposing it incapable of a disinterested attachment' (II, p. 16). This would provide evidence that she was capable of Godwinian disinterest and therefore could be a potential contributor to general utility. Almost despite her desires, she has elevated her 'individual affection' for Augustus into the 'general' because 'disinterested' good so essential to Godwin's thinking. The 'romance' interest enables Hays to act out her belief that she 'cannot love mankind collectively - they are a mere abstraction' whereas it coincides with her belief that she 'could have encreased the felicity and improvement of a small circle of individuals - and this circle, spreading wider and wider, would have operated towards the grand end, general utility' (Letter 21). This elevation of utility as a goal presupposes Godwinian 'disinterest', as careful examination of a typical passage from the novel shows:

> You may suspect me of wanting resolution, but strong, persevering affections, are no mark of a weak mind. To have been the wife of a man of virtue and talents was my dearest ambition, and would have been my glory: I judged myself worthy of the confidence and affection of such a man - I felt, that I could have united in his pursuits, and shared his principles - aided the virtuous energies of his mind, and assured his domestic comfort. I earnestly sought to inspire you with tenderness, from the conviction, that I could contribute to your happiness, and to the worth of your character. And if, from innumerable associations, I at length loved your person, it was the magnanimity of your conduct, it was your virtues, that first excited my admiration and esteem. (II, pp. 301-1)

Noticeably, it was the more philosophic relationship inspired by materialistic association which produced the relationship later based on love, while the use of 'conviction' suggests that more than 'desire' is involved and the rest of the narrative demands that the reader calculate the resultant cost, to Emma and to 'general utility', of Augustus's rejection. As I hope to have shown, this goes far beyond the response of a slighted lover because desire is

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33 See also Letter 10.

consistently conflated with Emma's need to contribute to radical progress. Hence, her accusing outcry that 'my reason was but an auxiliary to my passion, [because] it persuaded me, that I was only doing justice to high and uncommon worth' (I, p. 116) has to be considered within the Godwinian context of rational 'justice' which Emma's experience found to be untrustworthy. Her disinterested affection is evidence of the rational basis of her pursuit of Augustus, but this trust in disinterested affection is even seen as dangerous by the initial inspirer of Emma's interest: Mrs Harley, who argues that 'the world contains many benevolent, many disinterested spirits; but civilization as yet distempered and imperfect' (I, p. 44).

In Helvetian terms, Emma is justified in pursuing happiness through her passion for Augustus; in Godwinian terms, she is justified in trying to contribute to 'general good' but she has to convince Mr Francis, and through him Godwin, that she can only perceive her gaining of the second goal through the gaining of the first. This is why it is so philosophically imperative for Emma to pursue and gain Augustus and provides an explanation for her extraordinary offering of herself to him outside of marriage. Cutting through the ambiguities of decorum or 'the restraints of custom',[34] she makes her amazing declaration that '*My friend - I would give myself to you*-' (II, p. 68). This, she makes clear, is only necessary because of the obstacles Augustus has put in the way of their legitimate union or 'happiness'. It is encumbent on her as an advocate of the language of 'sincerity' to cut across his equivocations. She sees herself as having a duty to make him return her love because, firstly, he is worthy of it, secondly, because Emma would not have felt it if it was not reciprocated, and thirdly, because it provided her with the outlet for her own utility. When Emma claims: 'I would unite myself to a man of worth - I would have our mingled virtues and talents perpetuated in our offspring' (II, p. 54) she is speaking in terms of duty and utility. She does not take this step lightly, for she recognises that 'this is the critical moment, upon which hangs a long chain of events - This moment may decide your future destiny and mine - it may, even, affect that of unborn myriads!' (II, p. 68). This is not merely the cry of a desiring heroine but is the cry of someone who sees her contribution towards 'general good' as being totally identified with that of another; an 'object' which 'the mind must have' (II, p. 52).

She is consistent in her conflation of desire and radical utility, arguing that 'Could I have won him to my arms, I thought I could soften, and even elevate, his mind - a mind, in which I still perceive a great proportion of good' so that 'I weep for him, as well as for myself. He will, one day, know my value, and feel my loss' (II, p. 110). However, it was not this open flouting of sexual convention which was objected to so much as the scene in the library when Augustus and Emma meet unexpectedly after the death of Mrs Harley (II, pp. 132-43). This was the scene which Godwin objected to as showing Emma as 'having

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34 *Critical Review*, n.s. 19 (1797), pp. 109-11 (p. 110).

tried to seduce the affections of a married man when she knew not that he was married' and which prompted Hays to retort that although "dramatic", for her heroine to 'reproach herself' for this conduct it would be 'a morality I shou'd disdain nor do I feel any thing reprehensible in the unpremeditated conversation in the library [...]- If there was any guilt in any part of it, the guilt belonged only to Augustus' (Letter 31). Hays is revealing, through her plot, just how radical her own sense of morality was, founded as it was on a belief in the 'general good' to which she and her heroine aspired to contribute. I think the text makes it quite clear that Emma's avowal of her desires through her sexuality is to be seen as a means to the greater desire of utility and through it happiness. The *Analytical Review* inadvertently made such a connection when it focused its criticism on Emma's 'attack' on Augustus's 'principles', and insistence 'on the ground of utility, that it was incumbent on him to return the attachment'.[35] Hays's correspondence clarifies this perspective when Hays refers to Frend as being 'a great criminal, on my principles of morality' because 'he wou'd not receive and confer happiness' (Letter 21). Interestingly, in the novel it is Emma who has been made 'almost criminal in my own eyes' (II, p. 91) in support of her adopted warning role. This, despite the fact that the terminology used clearly deflects such blame onto Augustus and through him to Francis and then to Godwin.

What makes her situation so much the worse is that Emma now philosophically recognizes the likely consequences of her rejected position in that 'habit' ensures that 'the fabric can exist when the foundation has mouldered away' (II, p. 108). She knows that she will continue to love Augustus in spite of his rejection and, more importantly, that she will continue to see this rejection in terms of an impediment to her ultimate goal of contributing to utility. As she exultantly points out to Mr Francis, 'Is not this the theory which you have taught me?' (II, p. 108), which now is worsening her present situation and future hopes. In her case, habit has rendered Augustus necessary to her desires so that the thwarting of them might lead her to 'do mischief' just as 'the placid stream, forced from its channel, lays waste the meadow' (II, p. 52). Emma seems to enjoy reminding Mr Francis of his role as philosophical mentor as she mocks his incomprehension of her situation:

> Woe be, more especially, to those who, possessing the dangerous gifts of fancy and feeling, find it as difficult to discover a substitute for the object as for the sentiment! You, who are a philosopher, will you still controvert the principles founded in truth and nature? (II, p. 109)

The point is, that Mr Francis is a Godwinian, and not a Helvetian, philosopher and so would find her appeals unfounded in reason and justice and hence to be erroneous.

The role of Mr Francis is a particularly interesting one in that he is both 'humane and friendly' (II, p. 117) and 'oppressive' (I, p. 63). However, it is through the letters to him that Emma is enabled to pour out her frustrations with the philosophy he urges her to follow, frustrations which tend to evolve out of those she is simultaneously experiencing as

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35 *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 176-78 (p. 178).

a woman. Mr Francis's advice (closely modelled on Godwin's) to Emma for coping with Augustus's rejection is especially provoking to a woman whose 'dependence' has been forcefully made clear to her early in her experience. Apparently urging her to acquire a 'new train of impressions, of whatever nature, equally forcible with the past' she retorts 'You will tell me, It remains with myself whether I will predetermine to resist such impressions. Is this true? Is it philosophical? Ask yourself. What! can *even you* shrink from the consequences of your own principles?' (II, p. 116). The point being raised by this retort is that Francis has educated Emma in the strength of habit and asociation so that she is aware of the possible insurmountable difficulties she will face in trying to eradicate their influence. At the same time he appears to ignore the fact that Emma is, in any case, unable to indulge in the liberty of choosing a 'new train of impressions' of equal force with those associated with her passion for Augustus.[36]

Mr Francis is particularly inept at transferring his philosophical formulations to daily experience and Emma continually confronts him with what can only be taken as an inadequacy in him. At the same time his total disregard for any other form of response other than a rational one is strikingly inept to deal with Emma's circumstances and this accounts for the extraordinary outbursts she permits herself to make on paper, such as the following which is reproduced verbatim from a letter to Godwin on 6 February 1796 (see Letter 20):

> Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman - *crushed, and then insulted* - why call her to *independence* - which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? *This is mockery*! Even, you, wise and benevolent as you are, can mock the child of slavery and sorrow! (II, p. 107)

This is at the crux of Hays's own disenchantment with a philosophy which claims a central place for the shaping power of circumstances yet notably fails to include female circumstances within its operative terms. Emma is as much of an educative mentor to Mr Francis as he is to her but only if he is willing to allow her alternative reasoning a hearing. Rather than his function in the novel being one of educator he becomes increasingly more a vehicle for the release of Emma's philosophical frustrations. She enjoys re-using his words (as Hays did Godwin's) to force their inapplicability to be seen.

This would, indeed, be merely a novel of failure and 'warning' if Hays had not been further undermining the Godwinian discourse by simultaneously providing Emma with an Helvetian one to philosophically support her attack. Because Augustus had 'hinted at mysterious obstacles to the wish [...] of forming [...] a connection, nearer, *and more tender*, than that of friendship' (II, p. 57) she, as a good Helvetian, would find it necessary both to try to gain her desire which will procure happiness and to remove the obstacles put in its way especially those 'admitting hope because, obscurely seen', an effort

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36 See Letter 11, 13 October 1795 where Hays acknowledges her own need to 'engage with ardor in new pursuits'.

which she claims 'is no mark of weakness' (II, p. 113). On the contrary it would be a mark of Helvetian strength as she had a duty to attempt to remove the obstacles which were thought to be based in error.

This reading reduces what at least one reviewer saw as the distorted nature of the plot in that 'if it were natural, with such strong emotions, at first to avow the passion, it was certainly much otherwise to tease him with her neglected love'.[37] Godwin also pointed out that the 'radical defect' of the novel lay in the non-reciprocity of affection he thought resulted in Emma being 'interested only about herself' (Letter 31), which shows a failure to recognize the philosophical focus of the novel.[38] In defiance, Hays refused to compromise her story by making Emma's infatuation more plausible and excusable because to do so would have deflected the emphasis away from the philosophical perspective:

> No, my friend, my story is too real, I cannot violate its truth, by making Augustus either a coquet or a lover - I have a melancholy satisfaction in presenting to the stubborn heart, which I sought in vain to melt, a just, but far from exaggerated picture, of its own cruel and inflexible severity - yet though cruel he was not 'worthless'. (Letter 31)

Without the 'obscure' obstacles erected by Augustus Emma would not have been seen to emerge as a potential Helvetian 'genius' ready to take up the challenge, exert her strong passions and emerge from 'the beaten track', and most importantly make her attack on the philosophy which, through Mr Francis, was insisting that she give up her pursuit. By using a Helvetian perspective Hays is deflecting criticism away from Emma onto Augustus who clearly is to be seen as having missed his opportunity to be a contributor to her future happiness. As Hays tartly stated:

> It wou'd have been infinitely more interesting had my heroine been beloved, but this wou'd not have been the story I meant it should be, and to this scarcely any of the sentiments wou'd have been appropriate - It would also in my opinion have had less originality - in short, it would have made totally different characters. (Letter 31)

Thus her text utilized appropriate Helvetian terms, and more importantly, their efficacy in the daily living of her heroine in order to vindicate such an attack on an inadequate philosophy and Emma's actions. As she is prepared to acknowledge, 'Those who deviate from the beaten track must expect to be entangled in the thicket, and wounded by many a thorn - my wandering feet have already been deeply pierced' (I, pp. 178-79). Her pursuit of her desires (both emotional and philosophical) through Augustus demonstrates her potential 'genius', the thwarting of them is the only failure and this, as the plot shows, is independent of her control. Emma might be a failure in terms of Godwinian discourse but her engagement with a Helvetian one shows her as a success and, furthermore, enables her

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37 *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 177-78.

38 Hays pointedly reminded Godwin that his own Caleb Williams and Falkland were no 'less absorbed in their peculiar sufferings - and it is those individual sufferings which constitute the interest' (Letter 31). Her statement in the Preface that 'it was not *his* memoirs I professed to write' (I, p. 10) seems to me to be a clear and public retort to Godwin's attempt at interference with the characterization.

to turn the Godwinian one itself into the reason for Emma's apparent failure. Thus *Memoirs* does, indeed, issue a warning but one which warns against philosophy itself.

Close examination of language will show that *Memoirs* is not such a straightforward critique of sensibility as might appear and is in fact closer to a critique of the New Philosophy novel and the anti-Jacobin novels which sought to deride it. Emma recognises the ambiguities surrounding her Helvetian principles when she encourages her adopted son to do precisely what she has done and suffered for doing: 'exercise your understanding, think freely, investigate every opinion, disdain the rust of antiquity, raise systems, invent hypotheses, and, by the absurdities they involve, seize on the clue of truth.'[39] Importantly, she urges him in direct Helvetian terms to:

> Rouse the nobler energies of your mind; be not the slave of your passions, neither dream of eradicating them. [Because] sensation generates interest, interest passion, passion forces attention, attention supplies the powers, and affords the means of attaining its end; in proportion to the degree of interest, will be that of attention and power. Thus are talents produced. Every man is born with sensation, with the aptitude of receiving impressions; the force of those impressions depends on a thousand circumstances, over which he has little power; these circumstances form the mind, and determine the future character. We are all the creatures of education; but in that education, what we call chance, or accident, has so great a share, that the wisest preceptor, after all his cares has reason to tremble: one strong affection, one ardent incitement, will turn, in an instant the whole current of our thoughts, and introduce a new train of ideas and associations. (I, pp. 4-5)

This reads almost as a manifesto by which Emma sought to educate Augustus in Helvetian thinking so that he would be able to work out ways of avoiding the errors which have caused such misery to his adoptive mother.[40]

In *Memoirs*, then, Hays launched her attack on the Godwinian philosophy through the terms of its own discourse, systematically holding it up for examination in the light of her heroine's experience: an experience in which she found it to be inappropriate and even pernicious. This clarifies why Hays's letters to Godwin are so central to the narrative because the novel is examining the philosophical problems the heroine is facing and, therefore, the 'mentor' or 'monitor' is more important in helping her interrogate these problems than is the cause of them. Hence, Mr Francis is given a central role in aggravating the 'error' Emma apparently falls into. He urges Emma to 'cultivate' her 'talents' and '"learn to rest on your own powers"' (I, p. 64). This she does, and counts the cost, whereas it emerges that her instinctive belief in Augustus is, in fact, well founded. Mr Francis ignores the fact that Emma might wish to make an alternative inroad into utility. In

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39 Charles Lloyd's *Edmund Oliver* quotes this passage and attributes it to 'Miss Hays' in support of his Hays/ Gertrude character that 'every daring [...] attempt, every new experiment afford data to the mind; brings materials for after reflection; and he who would walk erect in the difficult path of life, must often have fearlessly plunged amid the intellectual chaos; from thence he will derive stores heretofore undiscovered, and by repeating his efforts will bring new combinations from the unassimilated and unarranged elements of moral science' (I, pp. 36-7).

40 Rather than rejecting determinism, as Gary Kelly suggests, Emma is taking pains to utilize Helvetian determinism to justify the errors of her life and narrative. See Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827*, p. 97.

many ways Mr Francis becomes an impractical deceiver unable to see the implications hidden within his discourse and he had early been cast as a dubious exponent of philosophy: 'however paradoxical, the manners of Mr Francis repressed, while they invited, confidence. I respected his reason, but I doubted whether I could inspire him with sympathy, or make him fully comprehend my feelings' (I, p. 71). He seems able to celebrate his position as philosopher/mentor without being able to see the consequences of his influence on his pupil. He misguidedly invites Emma to join his superior, radical position whilst failing to see that she is already at the forefront of it: 'Let it, then, be your noblest ambition to co-operate with, to join your efforts, to those of philosophers and sages, the benefactors of mankind' (I, p. 95). Hence, much of Emma's relationship with him is fuelled by both frustration and confrontation and the reader is led to see the inadequacy of his perceptions as he urges her to 'combat prejudice, to expand the mind, to give comprehensive views, to teach mankind their true interest, and to lead them to habits of goodness and greatness' because 'every prejudice conquered, every mistake rectified, every individual improved, is an advance upon the great scale of virtue and happiness' (I, p. 95). In effect, they are speaking different languages although using the same terms, Emma's usage always being determined by her practical experience, and different perspectives, Emma seeing the prejudice lying in Augustus and Francis seeing it lying within Emma. In a typical moment of frustration at his inability to apply his reasoning to experience she cries 'what does it signify whether, abstractedly considered, a misfortune be worthy of the names real and substantial, if the consequences produced are the same? That which embitters all my life, that which stops the genial current of health and peace is, whatever be its nature, a real calamity to me' (II, p. 104). I think this is the crux of the impasse between Emma and Mr Francis and, indeed, between Hays and Godwin in that neither man was prepared to acknowledge that thinking might not be able to control feeling. Helvetius provided her with a philosophical voice with which to ask the two men to consider that alternative philosophies might exist which would be more enabling to women desiring to contribute to the advancement of 'the great scale of virtue and happiness' so revered by Mr Francis.

Of course, Augustus's final declaration that he had loved her and that it was 'severe laws' and 'rigid' conduct (II, p. 182) which had impeded their union fully vindicates Emma's own ability to perceive truth. As she had repeatedly pointed out, she would not have loved someone who was not worthy of receiving it. The Augustus whom Emma is relentlessly cross-examining is not merely the hero of a sentimental romance but a prototype, Godwinian 'benevolent man' to whom Emma is offering the opportunity to develop into the actual example.[41] She assures him that she 'will never complain of any consequences which may ensue [...] from the utterance of all truth' (II, p. 18). This is the

41 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, I, p. 447.

reciprocal, confessional state wherein, if every man would be 'sure of meeting in his neighbour the ingenuous censor, who would tell to himself, and publish to the world, his virtues, his good deeds, his meannesses and his follies [...] how extensive an effect would be produced'.[42] Reciprocation which is so central to the romance novel, is also at the foundation of her own philosophy as she intones a platonic anecdote in support by telling of Plato's reply to a slanderer: '"I do not believe you, for it is impossible that I should not be esteemed by one whom I so sincerely regard"' (II, p. 12). Emma sees herself as walking in this area of mutual sympathy or 'union between mind and mind' (II, p. 153).

I would argue that, if Godwin's *Caleb Williams* had been written to explore the principles underlying his *Political Justice*, a case may be made for a similar, less sanguine and more direct examination of its philosophical claims in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. *Political Justice's* rhetoric forced objectivity onto the examples depicted, (as we saw in the famous Fenelon case), and forced the interrogation of experience to be analytical to the extent that this experience was to be seen as an encumbrance, a hindrance to the pursuit of 'truth', 'reason' and 'justice' which was to be based 'on a principle of deduction'.[43] Godwin's novel went some way to redress this avoidance of direct experience, Godwin claiming to have welcomed the opportunity to explore very real human emotions: 'perpetual apprehension', 'the most fearful alarm'.[44] Hays's correspondence suggestively describes how she too saw her fiction as being under the philosophical necessity of exploring her own experience through her heroine Emma, holding it up for scrutiny beneath her own 'metaphysical dissecting knife'.[45] I hope to have shown that not only was Emma's behaviour being ruthlessly dissected but also the philosophical inadequacies which made this behaviour inevitable. By making her heroine directly challenge the terms of Godwinian discourse Hays was simultaneously challenging its very principles encapsulated in its terms, and importantly, she was exposing them as inadequate within what was the experience of a large number of women. As Janet Todd has pointed out 'there was obviously a need for a "novel" that wholeheartedly supported the desiring heroine *and* radical politics',[46] but I would argue that *Memoirs* provided more than this, it invited its first reader, Godwin, to reassess his thinking in the light of the evidence provided, evidence which systematically undermined its efficacy.

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42 *Political Justice*, I, p. 240.
43 ibid., I, p. 90.
44 *Caleb Williams* ed. by David McCracken, p. 337.
45 ibid., p. 339.
46 *The Sign of Angellica*, p. 232.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VICTIM OF PREJUDICE: CHASTITY RE-NEGOTIATED

> If ever I venture on original composition, it will be for the declared purpose of combating, without fear or reserve, those pernicious prejudices, which have prey'd upon the vitals of human virtue and happiness, and to which moral martyrs have been sacrificed in hecatombs. (Letter 36)[1]

> She, who forfeits her chastity, withers by degree into scorn and contrition; but she, who lives up to its rules, ever flourishes, like a rose in *June*, with all her virgin graces about her - sweet to the sense, and lovely to the eye. Chastity heightens all the virtues, which it accompanies; and sets off every great talent, that human nature can be possessed of. It is not only an ornament, but also a guard to virtue. This is the great point of female honour, and the least slip in a woman's honour, is never to be recovered.[2]

In her Advertisement to *The Victim of Prejudice,* Hays declared that:

> In delineating, in the following pages, the mischiefs which have ensued from the too-great stress laid on the reputation for chastity in woman, no disrespect is intended to this most important branch of temperance, the cement, the support, and the bond, of social virtue: it is the means only, which are used to ensure it, that I presume to call in question. (n.p.)

However, despite Hays's conciliatory insistence that her new fictional exploration will be of the 'means' to maintain chastity, rather than the concept itself, *The Victim of Prejudice* tears apart the ideological necessity for its acceptance; the consequent reduction in self-valuation inherent in what it represents; its relationship to the prejudice and dependence which all of Hays's writings condemn. A letter to Godwin had already projected women as victims of chastity itself, in that chastity produced more problems for women, not because of the difficulties in maintaining it, but because of the hypocrisy surrounding it, which made its maintenance a site of error. She insisted:

> I regard chastity as an important branch of temperance, yet I likewise suspect that, on this subject many mistakes have been made, mistakes that have rendered the generality of men dissolute, and have divided women, with but few exceptions, into two classes of victims - Those who are necessitated by the worst kind of prostitution to exchange their persons for a subsistence: (for this traffic is no uncommon basis even of matrimonial arrangements) and those whom superior spirit and taste, or the want of meretricious allurement, condemn to the severe task of stifling every natural affection, and of exposing themselves, unprotected, weakened by education and habit, to insult if not to penury. (Letter 10)

She went further in 'Improvements Suggested in Female Education' by claiming that 'sexual distinctions respecting chastity, an important branch of temperance, have served but to increase the tide of profligacy, and have been the fruitful source of the greater part of the

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1 See note 3 to Letter 36.

2 Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740). Quoted in *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* ed. by Vivien Jones (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 29.

infelicity and corruption of society'.[3] Conventionally, a breach of chastity was seen as the bringer of calamity, whereas Hays is locating this calamity within the very idea of chastity itself. Hence, any examination of the 'means' will necessarily involve the reasons for these means. *The Victim of Prejudice* confronts the consequences of both retaining, and of losing, a supposedly stable and inviolate female attribute, and moreover reiterates Hays's pessimistic interpretation of determinism.

I

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONCEPT OF CHASTITY

The rhetoric surrounding chastity concealed its confining nature, encouraging women to perceive the very narrow boundaries which were being prescribed as engagingly protective.[4] Moreover, the need to make this confinement attractive demanded that the rhetoric obscure any inconvenient paradox by declaring it to be 'natural'. What had begun as 'necessary defences against women's appetites were increasingly considered to be "natural" female traits, invaluable to society as a whole'.[5] Paradoxically, despite chastity being a 'natural' feature of femininity, it nevertheless required a huge battery of props in order to preserve it. Simultaneously, the visible presence of these props signalled this preservation.

The concept of chastity is an interesting focal point on which several discourses converge. According to *The Polite Lady* it is:

> the most necessary and indispensable of all others [virtues], and without which, wit, beauty, sense, knowledge, and every other female accomplishment, are not only useless, but even pernicious and destructive [...] this lost, every thing that is dear and valuable to a woman is lost along with it; the peace of her own mind, the love of her own friends, the esteem of the world, the enjoyment of present pleasure, and all hopes of future happiness, at least in this life.[6]

As 'the greatest glory and ornament of our sex', it served to represent all other attributes of the constructed feminine.[7] Loss of chastity, then, invited dire consequences, especially as the punishment consequent on this loss was seen as precipitating further, inevitable, ruin to 'those unhappy wretches, victims of the sensuality of man, against whom every door is shut, who are thrown out from the bosom of society, abandoned and forlorn,

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3 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 193-95 (p. 194).

4 For instance James Fordyce in *Sermons to Young Women*, 3rd edn (1765), I, p. 102 used threatening language to identify an alternative course to the one prescribed:
But if a young person (supposing her disposition in other respects ever so good) will be always breaking loose through every domestic inclosure, and ranging at large the wide common of the world, those destroyers will see her in a very different point of light. They will consider her as lawful game, to be hunted down without hesitation. Similarly, Wetenhall Wilkes saw it 'as much the province of a licentious rake, to betray the young, the rich, the beautiful, or any female; as it is the quality of a fox to prey upon poultry'. Quoted in Vivien Jones, p. 31.

5 Poovey, p. 14.

6 *The Polite Lady; or, a Course of Female Education*, 3rd edn (London: Carnan and Newbery, 1775), pp. 84-7.

7 Poovey, p. 23.

without character, friends, or home'.[8] The inevitability of ruin was written into the terms of, and might seem to be inherent in, chastity itself as reinforced by the social processes set up to encourage such perception. Exposure of the speciousness of this conflation of desire and punishment becomes one of Hays's important contributions to the radical debate. She actively sought to expose the extent to which women's 'natural' behaviour was circumscribed, and was deemed to preclude response and spontaneity, both of which have a suggestive relationship with sexual desire, which the code decreed was to be at best non-existent, at worst controlled, through being denied.[9] A most convenient way to achieve this was by transforming desire into something else like gratitude.[10] 'Love' was too suggestive of reciprocity and response, and such rhetoric, as employed by writers such as Dr Gregory, could only accommodate response itself, through an elaborate discourse of negation, by locating female virtues within negatives, such as shamefacedness, sobriety, meekness, quietness 'modest reserve, [...] retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye'[11] and so on.[12] Hence, *The Polite Lady* offers as 'another great preservative of chastity', abstinence rather than challenge, by recommending the reader 'carefully to abstain from reading all plays, novels, or romances, that have the least tendency to corrupt and debauch the heart'.[13] In fact, the indulgence of <u>any</u> desire was construed as 'an enemy to this virtue of chastity'.[14] To be unchaste, then, signalled a subversive challenge to social order or, as Poovey claims, 'to define oneself by some other category than the paradox of sexuality/chastity was to move wholly outside of social definition, to risk being designated a "monster"'.[15] Any challenge to the ideal had to be interpreted as threatening.

So, whilst 'chastity may have been a merit of the first order, [...] its value was derived not so much intrinsically, from its physical enforcement, as from its subservience to a monogamous social ideal in which the woman, as property of her husband, devoted herself exclusively and good-naturedly to the promotion of his pleasure and the perpetuation of his

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8 Mary Hays, *Harry Clinton*, n.p.

9 See for instance Wetenhall Wilkes: 'Chastity is a suppression of all irregular desires, voluntary pollutions, sinful concupiscence, and of an immoderate use of all sensual, or carnal pleasures. Its purity consists in *abstinence* or *continence*". Quoted in Vivien Jones, p. 30.

10 For instance, John Gregory in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, 3rd edn (Dublin: Colles, 1774), p. 36, acknowledging that educated girls might have qualms about sexual response within marriage offers them the opportunity to perceive that 'what is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude and a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex'. Love is to be unacknowledged, 'if you love him, let me advise you never to discover to him the full extent of your love, no, not although you marry him' (ibid., p. 39).

11 ibid., p. 13.

12 ibid. For fuller discussion of this negation see especially Poovey, chapter one and Pollak, chapter two.

13 'Letter 34', p. 199. Amusingly, the writer continues 'what these are, I will not take upon me to say; for having never read any of them myself, I don't so much as know their names'. 'Letter 34', p. 199. Katherine Rogers discusses how this negative attitude to women's virtue has directly influenced women writers depiction of virtuous heroines in that 'the emphasis tends to fall on the errors she avoids rather than the good qualities she has'. See 'Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists: Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith', ECS, 11 (1977), 63-78 (p. 65).

14 Poovey, p. 20.

15 ibid., p. 23.

name and his estate',[16] as the unequivocal promotion of the sexual double standard reveals.[17] The most efficacious way these elements of control could be implemented was by forcing woman to see chastity as both natural and indispensible to the ideal of femininity which she could only reject at her peril. An emphasis on punishment as an inevitable consequence of non-retention helped to justify the high regard placed on it and writers drew upon and extended the symbol of the fallen woman, revealing her to be an inevitable victim, if not accessory, not just of the social rhetoric that had been adopted, but of the rhetoric's demon, female desire which, in itself, becomes punishable.[18]

Where sexuality is the active manifestation of desire, chastity is the passive equivalent, but paradoxically, its invisible presence is far more articulate because of its ready-made code of signifiers. Thus modesty 'is the outward expression of a pure and chaste mind: and therefore, every word you speak, every action you perform, every gesture of your body, every look of your eyes, every part of your dress; in fine, every thing by which the inward dispositions of the mind can be expressed and discovered, comes under the regulation of this virtue'.[19] Chastity demands non-response, whilst simultaneously indicating that response is available and this has clear implications for a follower of a philosophy based on response to external stimuli.[20] This need for control was easily demonstrable because of the rhetoric of paradox adopted by such writers as James Fordyce, Thomas Gisborne, John Gregory and so on, who, whilst extolling an attribute such as modesty, could simultaneously blame it for making woman more attractive to men so that, 'even as modesty was proclaimed to be the most reliable guardian of a woman's chastity - and hence the external sign of her internal integrity - it was also declared to be an advertisement for -

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16 ibid., p. 68. Its social role is highlighted by Hays in the *The Victim of Prejudice's* Advertisement's insistence that it is the 'Reputation' which is to be examined (n.p).

17 See for instance, *The Ladies Library*, I, pp. 165-66: "Now, in respect of the evil Consequences of Adultery", it is worse in a Woman than a Man, as bringing Bastardy into a Family, Disinherisons, and great Injuries to the lawful Children, infinite Violations of Peace, Murders, Divorces, and all the Effects of Rage and Madness. "In respect of the Crime", and as relating to God, they are equal, intolerable, and damnable." The rhetoric adopted attempts to make this position more attractive. See, for instance, George Savile, *The Ladies New-Years Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter*, 3rd edn, (London, 1688), pp. 33-34: 'The World in this is somewhat unequal, and our sex seemeth to play the *Tyrant*, in distinguishing *partiality* for ourselves, by making that in the utmost degree *Criminal* in the *Woman*, which in a *Man* passeth under a much *Gentler Censure*. The Root and excuse of this injustice is the *Preservation* of families from any mixture that may bring a blemish to them: and whilst the *Point* of *Honour* continues to be so plac'd, it seems unavoidable to give your *sex* the greater share of the penalty. But if in this it lieth under any *disadvantage*, you are more than recompens'd, by having the *Honour* of *families* in your keeping'.

18 Hays explores this further in *Harry Clinton* when the hero asks 'For one error, and that in the beginning often venial, is it just that a human being should be ever blasted? If those rigid barriers with which we surround female chastity have been rendered necessary by the laws of property, and the vices of civilized life, let us reflect for a moment whether, in straining them too far, we may not defeat the very purpose for which they were erected?' (n.p).

19 *The Polite Lady*, p. 203.

20 According to *The Ladies Library*, *Written by a Lady* [Mary Wray] 3 vols (London: Tonson, 1714) chastity potentially 'Tis a Triumph over a Desire which Nature has imprinted in the Heart of Man, fierce and unruly' and suppresses 'whatever is unlawful in this Passion; and all Desire is unlawful which is not warranted by Marriage', (I, p. 154).

and hence an attraction to - her sexuality'.[21] In fact, the demonstration of these very virtues tends to be what makes Hays's heroine attractive to her seducer in the first place. Her innocence makes her both vulnerable and seducible. Encoded within this rhetoric, is the real purpose of chastity; to protect women from men, not women from themselves, or their desires.[22]

A network of social necessities was conveniently promoted through the conflation of reputation and virtue, the former becoming a substitute for, rather than a protector of, the latter, as Dr Fordyce unashamedly made clear by associating a woman's 'virtue' with 'her reputation' which he claims 'to a woman is in effect nearly the same'.[23] It is reputation which secures virtue and not virtue itself because, 'virtue exists for its use to the woman's family and [...] therefore the reputation of virtue is what really counts [...]. The heroine who cares for the reality of virtue for her own sake finds herself in conflict with a society that cares mainly for the appearance of it'.[24] So, 'it was natural for women then to endeavour to preserve what once lost - was lost for ever, till this care swallowing up every other care, reputation for chastity, became the only thing needful to the sex'.[25] The passive (chastity) has been made to house the active (virtue), as even *Victim*'s Mr Raymond, Mary's guardian, had to reluctantly acknowledge:

> The good opinion of our fellow-beings is desirable: it is connected with usefulness, and ought not to be contemned [...], yet, reputation is but a secondary good; it wears the semblance of virtue, but, if prized before the substance, may accelerate the evil it was meant to avert.[26]

Simultaneously, concern for female reputation was seen as a necessary protector of the male, who, it was acknowledged, did, and, importantly, could, have desires. Women as beings without such desires would find it easier to resist temptation than the male, and so could take on the responsibility for his actions.

The transformation of chastity into an essential feminine requisite was, therefore, more than a moral expedient, it was also a socially necessary one. Such a conflation is typical of a discourse which utilizes a rhetoric of paradox in order to camouflage its specious origins

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21 Poovey, p. 21. As Dr Fordyce observed in *Sermons to Young Women*, I, p. 107: 'discrete reserve in a woman [...] contributes to maintain the proper reverence. Most of our pleasures are prized in proportion to the difficulty with which they are obtained'. Similarly he claimed 'There is nothing so engaging as bashful beauty [...] Men are so made they refuse their admiration where it is courted: where it seems rather shunned, they love to bestow it. The retiring graces have been always the most attractive' (I, p. 96).

22 On the topic of modesty Hays states, 'truth obliges me to add, that, here as usual, it is for their own sakes chiefly that men recommend it so very earnestly to the practice of women; and that it is their own dignity, comfort, and ease, which they consult principally upon this occasion, as well as upon almost every other', (*Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, p. 229).

23 *Sermons to Young Women*, 3rd edn. I, p. 107.

24 Spencer, p. 150.

25 Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975) pp. 242-43. Charles Lloyd's *Edmund Oliver*, indeed, declares that loss of virtue may be beneficial for a man: 'Mr Basil was carried away in his youth by those sympathies which lead us towards the other sex - he committed himself by an act of indiscretion, but his very follies have been the ministers of his present virtues', (II, p. 271).

26 *The Victim of Prejudice*, I, pp. 43-4.

and, in this respect, as Pollak explains, 'chastity was a comprehensive virtue embodying a complex ideal of female behaviour that extended far beyond the literal avoidance of illicit sex'.[27] If chastity could be exposed as socially 'constructed', rather than as 'natural', then the tragic consequences of its loss could also be given a social and, hence, less 'inevitably' damaging outcome. In specifically Helvetian terms, the social construction may be changeable and changed.[28] The consequence of its loss could become negotiable rather than inevitable. 'Loss' could become 'gain', and 'ruin', 'fulfilment'.

The strength of the traditional stress on the consequent fall is through a natural inevitability which is made to act as deterrent. It is by exposing this inevitability as spurious that Hays is able to challenge the whole causal chain of 'fall' being equivalent to 'ruin' as a socially constructed one. Hence the 'natural' aspect of the discourse, in itself a 'prejudice' in Godwinian terms, had to be challenged in order to free women from a position of weakness which, they had been led to believe, was a natural consequence of their sexual weakness: a position aptly demonstrated by the paradox of the sexual double standard by which man 'has hitherto been solicitous at once to indulge his own voluptuousness and to counteract its baneful tendencies' producing consequences which were 'not less tragical than absurd'.[29] More importantly, such consequences were promoted as inevitable and were inevitably punishing to the defaulter, woman. In order to free her 'victim' from social control, Hays typically adopts Helvetian methodology to expose the specious reasoning behind the discourse appropriated to secure chastity's retention. Instead of concentration on the consequences, whose inevitability is already secured, she demands that 'man revert to the source of these evils; let him be chaste himself, nor seek to reconcile contradictions. - Can the streams run pure while the fountain is polluted?'[30]

Hays also needed to isolate virtue, as active choice, from chastity, as precept or habit. As she says, 'do not then expect to join the extremes of active virtue, and passive obedience, in the characters and conduct of women, for they are incompatible'.[31] Until female virtue could be seen to be unconnected with female chastity, participation in the radical debate was necessarily limited because it was, to a large extent, unchosen, untruthful, or, in Godwinian terms 'insincere'. Where sexuality expresses activity, chastity encapsulates passivity and if sexuality does not exist, and, importantly, does not exist because it is a mode of self-expression, then the need for chastity similarly does not exist. Women's entry into the radical discourse, then, was being hindered by the passivity

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27 Ellen Pollak, pp. 67-8.

28 Carolyn Conley provides an interesting nineteenth-century example whereby the conflation of chastity and virtue is legally undermined: After sentencing a coachman to seven years' penal servitude for the rape of a gentleman's daughter, Justice Byles "was pleased to state that the young lady would leave the court a virgin". See *The Unwritten Law: Criminal Justice in Victorian Kent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 83.

29 Advertisement to *The Victim of Prejudice*, n.p.

30 n.p.

31 *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, p. 63.

necessitated by their very attempts to be virtuous. *The Victim of Prejudice* explores the paradoxes used to deny women power to negotiate their own terms of virtue and their own modes of self-expression. Because of virtue's sublimation into chastity, Hays does this through a re-definition of chastity itself, and by so doing she attempts to re-position women socially and philosophically. Hays has to remove chastity as a filter between expression and the 'sincerity' or 'candour' of radical thought so that rather than being 'philosophically irrelevant',[32] chastity was of the greatest philosophical importance in Hays's attempt to contribute to female entrance into radical progress as Hays's heroine insists that chastity be dislocated from what she wants to achieve: an expressive response to the concept of virtue.

II

The Victim of Prejudice has two plots, but focuses on the innocent plight of Mary, whose mother 'the wretched victim of sensuality and vice', (I, p. 148) after succumbing to seduction, follows the conventional path to ruin via prostitution.[33] She is finally hanged as a murderer's accomplice. The mother's story introduces the suggestion of inevitability surrounding the circumstances of the fallen woman, a conviction of which is ultimately adopted by the daughter. In the mother's 'history of my disgrace' (I, p. 149) she reveals her seduction, pregnancy, and subsequent betrayal, 'thrown friendless and destitute upon the world, branded with infamy, and a wretched outcast from social life' (I, p. 154). The mother is aware of the binding nature of circumstances as, in turn, the daughter will be forced to become:

> How far shall I go back? From what period shall I date the source of those calamities which have, at length, overwhelmed me? Educated in the lap of indolence, enervated by pernicious indulgence, fostered in artificial refinements, misled by specious, but false, expectations, softened into inbecility, pampered in luxury, and dazzled by a frivolous ambition [...]. (I, p. 152)

Rejected by her parents, Mary's mother is taken in by a friend but such support could not supply the necessary strength needed to combat her frailty: 'by what magical power or supernatural aid was a being, rendered, by all the previous habits of life and education system, weak and helpless, at once to assume a courage thus daring and heroic?' (I, p. 158). She gives birth to Mary, becomes a prostitute through penury and abandons her child:[34] 'I perceived myself the victim of the injustice, of the prejudice, of society, which, by opposing to my return to virtue almost insuperable barriers, had plunged me into

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32 Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 120.

33 For the reader's convenience, in view of the difficulty in obtaining a copy of the novel, I am including a full synopsis of the plot. Broadview Press expect to publish an edition of the novel in November 1994.

34 The state of perdition which she represents was read in different ways by conservative men and radical women. The former promoted it as a deterrent against the loss of chastity; the latter denounced it as an example of social victimization.

irremediable ruin' (I, p.162).[35]

Linking the two plots is the mother's plea to Mr Raymond to protect her daughter and:

> shelter her infant purity from contagion, guard her helpless youth from a pitiless world, cultivate her reason, make her feel her nature's worth, strengthen her faculties, inure her to suffer hardship, rouse her to independence, inspire her with fortitude, with energy, with self-respect, and teach her to contemn the tyranny that would impose "fetters of sex upon mind". (I, p. 169)

It is ironic that it is her mother who sets the spiral of Mary's descent in motion and that she is aware of her helplessness to combat this spiral as she declares: "It is to me, then, [...] wretched child of misfortune! that you owe this calamity; me, who am fated to involve in my destiny all who know or love me!" (II, p. 8). The first prejudice Mary encounters is towards her illegitimacy, and, in narrative terms, this clears up the mystery of why she cannot marry her childhood friend William, whose father is repelled by Mary's circumstances. In retrospect, when examining the links of her 'chain', Mary sees that her early embarrassment with William had been 'a prelude, as it should seem, to those anxieties and sorrows which have since pursued me with unmitigated severity, against which I have vainly struggled, and whose overwhelming consequences, I am no longer able to combat or evade' (I, p. 15). This embarrassment is caused by her ignorance of her illegitimacy. When she learns her true situation, fearing William's rejection of her, she is faced with two alternatives: virtuous truth or expedient falsehood. A refusal to perpetuate the prejudice towards her 'innocent' birth would necessitate the latter as she acknowledges that social practice has made 'reason [...] perverted and fettered, and virtue polluted at its source' (I, p. 174). To accept her position as tainted would be to collude with a very real, social prejudice, but Mary defiantly proclaims 'I am ready to renounce him the moment my reason is convinced that virtue demands the sacrifice' (I, p. 131). Due to his father's abhorrence of his son's relationship with the now 'guilty' Mary, William is forced to tour the continent for two years after which Mary agrees to marry him, having rejected his proposal of a secret ceremony before his departure. In his absence Mary courageously seeks to retain her sexual integrity but, made vulnerable after the death of her guardian, she finds herself powerless against the assaults of a neighbour, the tyrannical land-owning Sir Peter Osborne, who offers her 'insults', and then, in the face of her rejection, 'superintendence' of his house and family. She refuses, leaves to take up a governess position organized by Mr Raymond in London, where she is betrayed into imprisonment at Sir Peter's and where she 'suffered a brutal violation' (II, p. 79). However, in a reversal of conventional response, it is she and not her attacker who refuses to acknowledge the

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35 This is comparable with Hays's observation in the *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 194, that: Great care is taken to bar up every avenue against the return of this frail, unfortunate being, who, driven from the society and countenance of the virtuous and respectable, is reduced to associate with those whose habitual vices render them little calculated to assist her in regaining the path from which she has wandered. By these wise and humane methods, the tender, affectionate heart, betrayed, perhaps, by its own amiable susceptibility, and artless credulity, is precipitated by despair into real depravity.

significance of the deed, 'No one has a right to control me [...]. Think not, by feeble restraints, to fetter the body when the mind is determined and free' (II, pp. 81-82). Mary later rejects Sir Peter's offer to make her 'mistress of my fortune as of my heart' (II, p. 86).

The rest of the novel charts her 'inevitable' descent, despite her anticipation of 'the dignity of INDEPENDENCE' (II, p. 136). She finds herself rejected by all she applies to, consoling herself with the knowledge that 'in no one instance had I been wanting to myself, but, passive and helpless, a victim to circumstances over which I had little power' and beset by 'difficulties almost insupportable, difficulties peculiar to my sex, my age, and my unfortunate situation, [which] opposed themselves to my efforts on every side' (II, p. 116). Despite this, her 'bosom swelled with honest indignant pride' and she 'determined to live' (II, p. 143). Preferring to go to prison for debt rather than accept Sir Peter's offer of a settlement, she is freed by Mr Raymond's 'honest James' and taken to enjoy the 'sweets of independence' (II, p. 187) on his farm which belongs to Sir Peter. Credible, though coincidental, external circumstances force Mary to borrow money from a neighbour and repayment is eventually demanded. The plot escalates to demonstrate Mary's helplessness in the face of 'fate' as James dies, Sir Peter reiterates an offer of marriage and she is again arrested for debt. Social processes which accord with Mary's notions of philosophical causality are recognized as part of the inevitability she is trapped within. Her fated descent is underscored by the rhetoric's insistence on using the past tense: 'I seemed hitherto to have been surrounded by invisible agents and hidden snares, that had blasted my purposes, beset my paths, and frustrated my most sagacious plans' (II, p. 186). On the point of suicide, friends gain her liberty and a home where 'the body survived, but the spirit was fled. I seemed to endure a living death' (II, p. 223). After their deaths Mary looks forward to her own, in the hope that:

> the story of my sorrows should kindle in the heart of man, in behalf of my oppressed sex, the sacred claims of humanity and justice. From the fate of my wretched mother, (in which, alas! my own has been involved,) let him learn, that, while the slave of sensuality, inconsistent as assuming, he pours, by his conduct, contempt upon chastity, in vain will he impose on woman barbarous penalties, or seek to multiply restrictions; his seductions and example, yet more powerful, will defeat his precepts, of which hypocrisy, not virtue, is the genuine fruit. (II, p. 231)

The novel ends with her perception of herself as 'the victim of a barbarous prejudice, society has cast me out from its bosom [...] I have lived in vain' (II, pp. 230-31) and Mary is left to conclude that 'ignorance and despotism, combating frailty with cruelty, may go on to propose partial reform in one invariable, melancholy round; reason derides the weak effort; while the fabric of superstition and crime, extending its broad base, mocks the toil of the visionary projector' (II, p. 232), an echo of Hays's own impatience with Godwinian complacency towards the future reform of society which Mary had earlier voiced: 'Vain man! boast not perfections which tomorrow levels with the dust! Mysterious prerogative of

reason, bounded by the narrow limits of experience that, checking thy aspirations in their sublimest flights, binds them to earth in adamantine chains!' (II, p. 48).

It is fitting that the narrative begins with Mary looking back over her life which, in effect, began before she was born. It opened with Mary offering her story as a warning of social causation, the consequences of which have determined her life and narrative. Her warning is to be seen not merely as demonstrating the victim-position of women, but also as an exposure of the warning's social inadequacy. Mary is presented as being threatened by the inevitability which traps her into being this victim-figure so that she has to be made into more than just the daughter of the mother. In *The Victim of Prejudice* we see an insistence on the individual being perceived as such, in her own time and place, outside the limitations of parentage and inheritence. She wishes to be rid of the causally-limiting influence of parentage.

Appropriately, given Hays's belief in future reformation, she offers herself as a sacrifice in order to prepare future generations for the traps of inevitability which her own 'reason', 'independence', 'fortitude' and 'self-respect' did not prepare her for:[36]

> And thou, the victim of despotism, oppression, or error, tenant of a dungeon, and successor to its present devoted inhabitant, should these sheets fall into thy possession, when the hand that wrote them moulders in the dust, and the spirit that dictated ceases to throb with indignant agony, read; and, if civil refinements have not taught thy heart to reflect the sentiment which cannot penetrate it, spare from the contemplation of thy own misery one hour, and devote it to the memory of a fellow-sufferer who derives firmness from innocence, courage from despair; whose unconquerable spirit, bowed but not broken seeks to beguile, by the retrospect of an unsullied life, the short interval, to which will succeed a welcome and never-ending repose. (I, pp. ii-iii).

Paradoxically, Hays would seem to be concurring with her heroine's culpability, similar to that of conduct-book writers, through her readiness to adopt the conventional novelistic punishments associated with the 'crime' she sought to nullify.[37] However, Hays took pains to show that Mary junior could not avoid the punishment meted out to the mother any more than she could avoid punishment whilst remaining innocent. Her heroine's eventual acquiescence with her fate, and offering of herself as social victim suggests that the impasse is, indeed, impassable and that the stress on deviance so favoured by conduct-book writers is legitimate. Mary's 'deviant' behaviour through initial refusal to accept her 'fate' is punished, and this punishment is stressed as being inevitable. Hays does attempt to break out of this bind by, again, returning to the origins of her philosophical thinking; causation. If she could show Mary's plight to lie outside her own volition she could strengthen her position as a social, rather than natural, victim. Hays has to remove the

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36 The protective qualities her mother had begged Mr Raymond to encourage in her (I, p. 169).

37 Compare for instance Sarah Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughter* (1970) which stresses that 'next to the consciousness of acting right, the public voice should be regarded' and whose ostensible narrator is quite prepared to acept the blame for a misunderstood interpretation of her behaviour. See its inclusion in *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor* (Dublin: Archer, 1790).

'inevitable' consequences of the act out of the 'natural', and into the deterministic realm. The 'naturalness' of the rhetoric surrounding chastity had to be exposed as specious in order for chastity to become non-prejudicial and, hence, 'virtuous' so Hays shows it, more properly, to be constructed out of custom, as supported by, in its present state, female education. Mary foregrounds the spurious equation of virtue and chastity by refusing to act as if unchaste, which is what society demands in order to secure the link.

Whilst seeking to draw attention to the specious use of the concept of 'the natural' as co-terminous with 'the inevitable', Mary, in fact, finds herself bound up in a process of cause and effect which is socially driven but which cannot be interrupted until society agrees with such interruption. Thus, whilst *The Victim of Prejudice* has attempted to show that the concept of chastity can be made negotiable, a matter of attitude, it has simultaneously proclaimed it as 'philosophically' non-negotiable within the constraints of determinism. Hays's chosen, Helvetian philosophy does nothing to improve this impasse for the individual concerned, and, in Godwinian terms also, while the virtue of women, embodied in chastity, is based on falsity and hypocrisy, it cannot be productive of good. Thus, chastity is prejudicial because of its causal basis, which necessitates the distortion of the chaste and the ruin of the unchaste. Neither can have access to virtue until the terms of chastity are re-negotiated to accommodate active response and moral choice.

In 1797 Hays had written condemning the social emphasis on chastity's irredeemable nature in the *Monthly Magazine*, under the more general topic of female education:

> Sexual distinctions respecting chastity, an important branch of temperance, have served but to increase the tide of profligacy, and have been the fruitful source of the greater part of the infelicity and corruption of society. [...] One of the principal causes which seems to have given rise to the present dissolute and venal motives by which the intercourse of the sexes is influenced, is perhaps the dependence for which women are uniformly educated.[38]

Female education is one prejudice which perpetuates the further prejudice surrounding chastity. Until this 'cause' is changed the effect of prejudicial chastity cannot be removed, and progress will be impeded. The dependence which Hays thinks produces dissoluteness is, paradoxically, caused by marriage, and marriage necessitates chastity. Hays makes a defiant claim for sympathy for those who 'fail in this sole method of procuring for themselves an establishment' and who have to face the consequences of this failure.[39] The implication is, as *Victim* makes clear, that for women, chastity is merely an acknowledgement of their marketability, being 'deeply entangled with the system of property'. Moreover it is 'one of those evils flowing from feudal institutions; the baneful effects of which can only cease with the renovation of civil society'.[40] Clearly civil society

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38 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), (p. 194).

39 ibid.

40 ibid., pp. 194-5. The necessity for this gendered distinction enabled Dr Fordyce to acknowledge that 'The world, I know not how, overlooks in our sex a thousand irregularities, which it never forgives in yours; so that the honour and peace of a family are, in this view, much more dependant on the conduct of daughters than of sons', (*Sermons to Young Women*, 3rd edn, I, p. 17). See also Catherine Macaulay,

is the producer of 'baneful effects' which inevitably follow on a breach of chastity. She archly continues: 'To demonstrate the truth of this philosophic and merciful adage' women are refused re-entry into society. Inevitability has to be challenged because this is, in itself, creating another link in the causal chain of dependence. Challenge anticipates its removal and negotiates independence but Hays's re-defined 'virtue' has been powerless to help Mary repulse such inevitability:

> I have sought to beguile my woes by tracing their origin and their progress [...] Involved as by a fatal mechanism, in the infamy of my wretched mother, thrown into similar circumstances, and looking to a catastrophe little less fearful, I have still the consolation of remembering that I suffered not despair to plunge any soul in crime, that I braved the shocks of fortune, eluded the snares of vice, and struggled in the trammels of prejudice with dauntless intrepidity. But it avails me not. (II, pp. 212-13)[41]

Mary's innocence, yet treatment as if guilty, is an even greater indictment of society's exclusion of the 'frail, unfortunate being, who finds that 'great care is taken to bar up every avenue against' her return to society and virtue.[42]

Hays had already begun her very radical re-definition of chastity in *Memoirs*, (in the scene which, as we have seen, stimulated most of the criticism towards the novel, and its author), when Emma declares her desire to live, unmarried, with Harley, and that it is this position which 'would triumph, not over my principles, (*for the individuality of an affection constitutes its chastity*) but over my prudence [...] This proposition, though not a violation of modesty, certainly involves in it very serious hazards - It is, wholly, the *'triumph of affection!'*[43] Affection replaces chastity as the key to female virtue and could be seen as opening up the female position through the flexibility of choice it offered, and is therefore at odds with the traditional negation of female self-expression encapsulated in chastity.[44] Letter 16 clarifies this position, '- chaste, virtuous, and individual, affection, I believe to be one of the highest, most delicate, and most ineffable, sources of our satisfactions -'. Her chastity is, hence, liberating and not confining, as traditionally depicted. Where the conduct-book writers emphasised the compensatory protection of this narrow sphere, Hays was claiming a right to enlargement and rejection of protection. This wider attitude to affection enables Mary, as Emma before, to risk disregard of the rules of

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Letters on Education, pp. 220-21: 'the great difference now beheld in the external consequences which follow the deviation from chastity in the two sexes, did in all probability arise from women having been considered as the mere property of the men; [...] when the plea of property had been given up [... it] was still preserved in society from the unruly licentiousness of the men, who [...] continue [...] by mutual support and general opinion to use their natural freedom with impunity [...] This state of things renders the situation of females [...] very precarious'.

41 Compare: 'I looked backward with complacency on a spotless life: the recollection of my misfortunes lost its poignancy when I reflected that by no prudence could they have been averted, nor could any activity have served to repel them. In no one instance had I been wanting to myself, but, passive and helpless, a victim to circumstances over which I had little power.' (II, p. 116)

42 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 194.

43 *Memoirs*, II, pp. 65-6.

44 See Poovey, p. 21.

punctilio in her conduct; rules which insist on the infallibility of chastity as an indicator of female virtue and, at the same time, stand as barriers to sincerity.[45]

Clearly, chastity, the embodiment of all other virtues, is here, only an aspect of the larger one of affection, where affection is a question of individual choice and is, therefore, outside social control. Mary refused to perceive that an important violation to her had, in fact, taken place, and this was her strength, and also her failing. This was questioning the whole basis of her society which required women to live in fear of the very thing Mary saw as a non-event. Her innocence enables her to scorn such a conflation which she refuses to accept:

> My honour say you, can never be restored to me? Oh! 'tis false! 'tis base as barbarous! Its lustre, which you have sought to obscure, will break out, in your despight, from the temporary cloud which envelops it, with undiminished brightness. My spirit, superior to personal injury, rises above the sense of its wrong, and utterly contemns you! I spurn the wealth you offer, the cursed price of innocence and principle, and will seek, by honest labour, the bread of independence. You have afflicted, but you cannot debase me [...] I defy and despise you! (II, pp. 86-7).

She contradicts the terms of chastity with a discourse of flexibility and movement. Significantly, as fallen woman, she sees herself as rising.

If chastity is to be determined according to the truth of one's response to another, then this runs counter to the traditional exhortations to women to be non-responsive.[46] The response Hays encourages is <u>active</u> because it is based on recognition of one's own part in mutual, 'sincere', and indeed, sexual attraction. This is most clearly seen in Hays's preoccupation with the use of language in *Memoirs* where Emma insists that Harley recognises his inability to articulate his feelings towards her. In both novels the overwhelming eloquence of the narrators acts as an indication of their capacity for communicating sincerity and truth. Consequently, response indicates the moral worth of the receiver or inspirer, and in Helvetian terms, indicates the more active abilities, which groups, such as women, are denied. Chastity has become morally active rather than passive (although still non-initiatory), and thus, for would-be radical women it could provide an entrance into radical utility, albeit in a supporting role. As *Memoirs* shows, and as her correspondence to Godwin corroborates, Hays sees that, for women, affection provides this entry into radical utility.[47] Attitudes to Mary demand that she be assessed as sexually tainted, both before and after her rape, whereas Mary insists that her reputation be judged separately from her virtue. Where women had been taught to see their sexual desires as encumbrances to virtue, Hays had argued in *Memoirs* that these may be producers of it, whilst, in *Victim* she claimed that it was the 'prejudice' within the concept of chastity which was the impediment to the attainment of this virtue. Just as chastity denies sexual

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45 See *Love-Letters*. p.60.

46 See Poovey, p. 24.

47 See Letter 20 'I pursued what I was convinced, if attained, would be, comparitively [sic] <u>a certain good</u>'.

desire, so the passive virtue enclosed within it, may be transformed into an active one, paradoxically through sexuality as Emma Courtney had sought to prove.

At the same time, chastity had to be philosophically wrong because it passively upheld these false premises, whereas Hays insisted, with Godwin, that 'by virtue, I do not mean the mere absence of gross vice: virtue is active - "It is sense, and spirit with humanity," and must be the result of reflection, and fixed principle. The weak and the ignorant can never be properly termed virtuous'.[48] Weakness and ignorance were the foundations of the female virtue necessary to preserve both chastity and by extension, society. They form part of 'the magic circle', out of which women 'cannot move, but to contempt or destruction'.[49] The traditional concept of absolute chastity has been made philosophically untenable.

Whilst Godwin, Thomas Paine and others were locating political strategies of dominance in government and other institutions, Hays was pointing out their roots within 'sexual distinctions' as imposed by such institutions.[50] For women chastity was of major philosophical and political interest as it concerned autonomy and presented a challenge to social modelling. It encapsulated all that was wrong in female education. Hays makes this clear in her Helvetian conclusion to a *Monthly Magazine* article:

> Till one moral and mental standard is established for every rational agent, every member of a community, and a free scope afforded for the exertion of their faculties and talents, without distinction of rank or sex, virtue will be an empty name, and happiness elude our most anxious research.[51]

Paradoxically, by refusing to consider chastity as anything other than a mere technicality Mary has, in fact, turned it into a dynamic facilitator of self-power. Mary exposes it as the symbol it had always been. Of course, Hays was not the only writer to make such challenges, but whereas the 'inevitability' of the consequences of a 'fall' were carefully and sympathetically charted by, for instance, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Eliza Fenwick, Hays turned her attention to this inevitability through causality itself. She shows this to be the accessory to a threatened society, ready to ensnare the already vulnerable woman, by removing any freedom she might have over the consequences of either willed or imposed sexual action. Consequently, *The Victim of Prejudice* radically challenges the traditional 'warning' to young women popularised by the likes of James Fordyce who insisted on the importance of reputation as a valuation of

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48 Elsewhere in *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, p. 63, Hays could pointedly argue 'do not expect then to join the extremes of active virtue and passive obedience, in the characters and conduct of women, for they are incompatible'.

49 *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, p. 70.

50 See Letter 20. Compare also Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pp. 83-7: 'Why should it [dependence] be increased by prejudices that give a sex to virtue, and confound simple truths with sensual reveries? [...] Let men become more chaste and modest, and if women do not grow wiser in the same ratio it will be clear that they have weaker understandings [...] the prevailing notion respecting a sexual character was subversive of morality, and I have contended, that to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolized, when little virtue or sense embellish it with the grand traces of mental beauty, or the interesting simplicity of affection.

51 *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 195.

virtue. Despite the punishment meted out to her heroine, Hays knew that virtue and reputation were very different considerations, as her Preface demonstrates, and she went further to reveal chastity as a negative, rather than a positive, virtue, as well as being a social controller upheld by the spurious presence of 'reputation' in the configuration. As Mary continues to show, her virtue is intact if her hymen is not. Whilst conduct-book rhetoric insinuated that chastity's limitations were actually aids to freedom, mainly through the 'protection' it could offer women,[52] Hays's rhetoric insisted on its limitations being seen as such. Paradoxically, by changing the terms of it, she transforms it into something which is liberating through its new, self-determined nature. Chastity, and hence, virtue, had become a precept learnt, a habit without conviction, and whereas conduct-book writers depended on this naturalization of instilled bahaviour, Hays sought to expose this as an imposition in her attempt to free woman to assume responsibity for action. Only then might she adopt the radical discourse of 'reason, justice and happiness'.[53]

Unfortunately, Hays's Helvetian thinking detracts from this positive self-evaluation, as Mary traces the causal chain within the uncontrollable, but controlling, circumstances of her birth. As an innocent, yet illegitimate, woman she is already tainted before her own violation, and is as unable to marry well as if it had already taken place. This circumstance, with its attendant 'false scruples and artificial distinctions' also perplexes the 'dictates of virtue' so that 'the mind becomes entangled in an inextricable labyrinth, to which there is no clue, and whence there is no escape' (I, p. 130). Her birth ensures her victim status. *The Victim of Prejudice* shows chastity to be yet one more constraint on women's behaviour and their goal of 'independence'. By refusing to become what society demands of a fallen woman, Mary challenges what that society allows in sexual terms. As we have seen, sexuality was very much a part of the philosophical, as well as political, position of Hays. In *The Victim of Prejudice*, by implication, chastity is representing woman's denied sexuality, in that the need to demand chastity of its women suggests a fear that women are indeed sexual creatures. Whereas *Memoirs* explicitly voices a refusal to comply with social restraints on female sexual response, (although this refusal is itself frustrated) *Victim*'s heroine questions the validity of its counterpart, or harness, chastity itself, which had to be exposed as being the manoeuvrable construct it was. In essence, the rape is immaterial but it helps Hays focus attention on the nature of prejudice which the text shows to be constructed and, hence, removeable.

Mary is not only deemed culpable because illegitimate, but also because her evaluation of her 'nature's worth' destablilizes her perception of her social worth. She imagines this 'self-respect' will override what society chooses to perceive as properly punishable. Thus,

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52 According to Dr Fordyce in *Sermons to Young Women*, God had 'raised a kind of fence about them, to prevent those wilder excursions into which the other sex are frequently carried, with a freedom unchecked by fear, and favoured by custom' (II. p. 119).

53 *Political Justice*, ed. by Kramnick. p. 8.

the results of the mother's plea to Mr Raymond further excite the 'prejudice' of the society which has already condemned the mother because the daughter does not accept her own 'sinful' position but, rather, sees it as merely a 'prejudice' of society and, therefore, not her responsibility. According to the daughter it is only in social, inherited terms that a crime has been committed by her. With hindsight and acknowledging her unsought, equivocal position in society, Mary considers her protective education as 'a material link in the chain of events, that led to the subsequent incidents of my life', and even her guardian, Mr Raymond, a Mr Francis/Mr Godwin figure, has to confess to his doubts as to whether 'in cultivating my mind, in fostering a virtuous sensibility, in imbuing my heart with principles of justice and rectitude, he had not been betraying my happiness!'

Happiness, the product of philosophical reasoning, is being betrayed by this very reasoning, as experience for Mary, Emma, and Hays bears out. The happiness attendant on virtue is paradoxically at risk because of such virtue. Once more, theory collides with experience. The plight of a 'reasoning' fallen woman is an excellent example of where this collision occurs. It demonstrates the fragility of only potentially controllable circumstances, whilst simultaneously pointing out that rationally challenging these circumstances can only make the individual's situation worse.

Mary's refusal to become Sir Peter's mistress, and ultimately his wife, shows her refusal to compromise herself by winning society's approval. Whereas chastity is invisible, loss of it demanded the woman's invisibility. Mary's initial uncowed presence challenged this acceptance of wrong-doing.[54] In effect, she is attempting to thwart social causation by not playing her allotted role, as articulated by writers such as the Marchioness of Lambert, who asserted that:

> Women that have had the misfortune to deviate from their duty, to break through decorum, to part with their virtue and modesty, owe so much regard to custom, and ought to have such a sense of their breach of chastity, as to appear with a mortified air; it is a sort of satisfaction that the public expects from them; it is sure to remember your faults whenever you appear to forget them.[55]

Hays's projected chastity would no longer be a social construct, but be self-determinable, dependent on an act of will which has nothing to do with physical retention or loss. The presence of the hymen becomes negotiable and is largely irrelevant and her sense of this distinction helps Mary ignore the physical nature of the violation. Hays's writing gives the lie to the huge edifice surrounding the behaviour of women, whose main task in life was to secure the signs of female virtue as an indication of the retention of such an invisible feature. Mary's challenge to Sir Peter shows how worthless she considers virtue based on 'reputation' to be and, thus, turns her situation into a confrontation with society itself. That Mary remains a victim is inevitable, as she has inherited a subordinate

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54 See Susan Staves, 'British Seduced Maidens', ECS, 14 No 2 (1980-81), 109-34 (pp. 122-32) where she discusses punishments for the unchaste at the disposal of the ecclesiastical courts.

55 *The Young Lady's Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor*, p. 171.

position as the victim of social injustice. Until the chain was broken women were to remain powerless to effect the change their narratives were showing to be necessary. On the other hand, by locating the problem within education and social error, Hays was, in fact, declaring a very radical and optimistic hope for the future. Change can be implemented but not in time for Mary, or Emma, or their creator.

She puts the symbol to the test of experience, and what we have is as much a novel about individual choice and its consequences for autonomy as a novel about 'the means [...] which are used to ensure' chastity.[56] Whilst Mary abhors the rape, she refuses to perceive its consequences as inevitable in the social sense in which her mother perceived her seduction. However, she does eventually recognise, what is for her, the far more binding nature of causal inevitability. By focusing on her innocence through rape, Hays foregrounds the ambiguity surrounding female innocence, virtue, chastity. She initially attempts to ignore the 'fatal mechanism' (II, p. 213) which will trap her, preferring to display the 'reason and virtue' inculcated in her, and so patently lacking in Emma Courtney's response. Where Emma, almost pathologically, dwelt on associations and links in her 'chain', Mary 'repelled, with severe inflexibility, the recollections that every moment struggled to obtrude themselves: I suppressed the rising sigh; I avoided every object connected with the past; I occupied myself incessantly [...] I devised means to interrupt and break the chain of habits and associations that was incessantly betraying my resolutions' (II, p. 50). That she attempts this pacifies the radicals; that she fails justifies Hays's philosophical obsession with causality and its collusion with the role of woman as victim. Because Hays is drawing attention to the spurious concept of chastity, it does not really matter whether Mary was seduced or raped, although the latter helps the author proclaim more easily the heroine's role of victim.

III

CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE NOVEL

I think it is useful to examine the critical reception of this novel as it tends to show how seriously *Victim* has been mis-read, critics often focusing on what are seen as the weaknesses of the argument which I am claiming to be its very strengths. A philosophical reading is essential for these strengths to emerge. Whereas the reception of *Memoirs* was condemnatory in an overtly moralistic way, that of *Victim* was both more mixed and more specifically political. According to Luria, the novel found a far more tolerant audience in France where the translator claimed that:

> s'il est encore des personnes qui aient conservé du gout pour ce qui est bon, pour ce qui est brai et ce qui est beau, s'il existe encore des ames sensibles et

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56 Advertisement, n.p.

genereuses, qui eprouvent un doux plaisir a s'interesser à la vertu malheureuse, qu'elle's s'empressent de lire les aventures de l'infortunee Mary[57]

More surprisingly, is the fact that the translator feels that a child would benefit from reading the novel as 'son coeur se conservera pur, et si elle eoit foible et disposee au vice, elle trouvera un frein puissant dans la description des suites affreuses ou un faux pas conduit souvent un sexe credule et sans experience'.[58]

The *Analytical Review* similarly saw the novel in terms of success and failure. Whilst applauding 'a mind apt at moral description, fertile in sentiment, and considerably skilled in the science of the feelings', it considered Hays to have failed in her Advertisement's aim:

> If we have understood her rightly, this was, to exhibit the impropriety of the means used to ensure female chastity, and to expose the inconsistency of man, in expecting from women a virtue which he so grossly neglects himself. The connection between the moral of the story before us, and the enforcement of this doctrine, we confess we do not clearly perceive. (p. 328).

The reviewer seems to have missed the point that the questioning of chastity involves the re-appraisal of virtue itself. More encouragingly, the *New Annual Register* included *Victim* in the eight volumes of the year 'entitled to the highest comparative praise',[59] whilst the *Monthly Magazine* referred to it as 'a pathetic and instructive story, displaying its author's strong natural powers, and an unrestricted freedom of thinking, which to some timid spirits may give displeasure' as 'several parts [...] are objectionable'.[60]

Although the *Monthly Review* refers to the heroine being a 'spirited and affecting sketch' who is 'to the credit of the author's pencil' she is 'somewhat out of nature'. The review sees the novel in terms of opposition typical of 'the novels which issue from this school' and as offering the consolatory myth that 'the wisest and the best are often the slaves and victims of circumstances' and rebukes the depiction of Pelham Senior's 'objection' to his son's marriage to Mary as 'mere prejudice'. Completely rejecting the whole message of the novel the review concludes that although 'we must love and pity such a character as Mary Raymond [...] her misery results rather from a general sentiment of detestation of atrocious crimes, than from any act which is entitled to the appellation of tyranny'.[61] The *Critical Review* goes further, declaring that 'we do not hesitate to pronounce that they [talents] are employed in a manner highly dangerous to the peace and

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57 Quoted in Luria, 'Mary Hays', p. 394.

58 ibid., p. 395. I have also traced a translation called *La Chapelle D'Ayton, o u Emma Courtney* published in 4 vols in Paris 1810 which claims that:

> Deux puissances gouvernent la vie de l'homme, sa vocation et sa destinée; celle-ci entraîne ses pas, tandis que l'autre demeure en possession de sa volonté: c'est ce qui fait que le corps et l'esprit vont si rarement ensemble, et que la tâche qu'il leur est imposée de pour suivre en commun est d'ordinaire si mal remplie. [n.p.].

59 *New Annual Register, or General Repository of History, Politics, and Literature, for the Year 1799* (London: Robinson, 1800), p. 276. Hays might have felt reassured to find her own work recommended alongside Godwin's *St Leon*, especially in view of their apparent literary rivalry (see letter 42).

60 *Monthly Magazine*, 7 (1799), p. 542.

61 *Monthly Review*, 31 (1800), p. 82.

welfare of society'.[62] Importantly, the reviewer contends that 'it is not the ability or the intention of Miss Hays that we dispute; it is the accuracy of her judgement' in that the novel 'exhibits that splenetic irritability which, by distorting decorum into prejudice, and custom into tyranny, tends to excite and to nourish the contagious and consuming fever of perverted sensibility'. Unnervingly, the reviewer manages to challenge the very conclusions Hays draws: 'Do our municipal institutions afford no redress for the seductive or forcible violation of female chastity, and has no public benevolence provided no asylum for those repentant victims who would wish to escape from to virtue?' (p. 452). In an attempt to silence further 'inaccuracies' the review continues: 'A reformation of manners cannot be promoted by indiscriminate imputations on society and the laws' (p. 452).

Major objections are to the use of *'philosophical* jargon, [which is] indelicately illustrated in the precepts, and exemplified by the practice, of the advocates of the modern rights of women', and to the fact that Hays is not 'a More, a Barbauld, and a West' who are, it is claimed 'monuments of well-directed genius, and will be deservedly admired when all the impassioned imitations of Rousseau and Diderot shall cease to be remembered' (p. 452). Hays is clearly in the wrong novelistic tradition and is guilty of malpractice towards the reader. The review concludes with observing that:

> if the sad vicissitudes of this tale be founded on fact, happily they are of a very uncommon description; but that if, on the contrary, they merely be the offspring of the novelist's imagination, the offence is more than a gross outrage on probability: it is harrowing to agony [sic] feelings which deserve more respect than to be made the idle sport of unnatural fiction. The wanton use of stimulants tends to deaden the acuteness of sensation. (p. 452)

This shows a gross mis-reading, if only of the mechanics of the novel which have consistently demonstrated that Mary's treatment is all too probable. What is, perhaps, more distasteful to the reviewer is the narrative's examination of the cause of this probability, in that chastity has become one of those 'erroneous values',[63] or prejudices, which the Jacobin novelists sought so eagerly to eradicate. Hays has deliberately exaggerated the consequences of its loss in order to attack the more prejudicial, absolute, cause itself or *'the mischiefs which have ensued from the too great stress laid on the reputation for chastity'* (I, p. 1).

IV

In many senses the novelistic form Hays adopts militates against her. The narrative of the mother passed on to the daughter via Mr Raymond ensures that the mother's past is seen to intrude on the daughter's present. Similarly, the daughter's experience has also been turned into history for the benefit of the next inmate of the prison. Private experience is made to confront public condemnation and the oratorical tone of much of the language

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62 *Critical Review*, n.s. 26 (1799), pp. 450-52 (p. 450).

63 Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 308.

used underlines the powerlessness of the individual towards Mary. By Hays making both narratives 'histories' for the benefit of others, Mary's attempt at self-expression and autonomy is doomed to failure. The continuity of the narratives is important in establishing the links between their very different experiences; however, this very form also reinforces the ruthlessness of social pursuit and punishment. In other words, the narratives themselves become an agent in helping to formulate an oppressive link in the plot's inevitability. As Mary claims 'the fatal tale of my disgrace pursued and blasted all my efforts' (II, p. 140). Like Helvetian optimism, Hays's plea for female independence can only be a future eventuality. Sacrifice now may bring about independence later. The punishment traditionally meted out to the 'fallen woman' holds sway in *The Victim of Prejudice.* The triumph Mary anticipates is denied her, not only because of the prejudicial circumstances her victimisation exposed, but also because the deterministic discourse Hays had adopted had already consolidated Mary's failure. Moreover, even the hopeful future change may also be denied because of the narrative structure. With its emphasis on the conventionality of punishment it could be read as bolstering up the very image which Hays was so determined to challenge: that of the punishable deviant offender. Her concentration on the inevitable nature of her punishment, whilst exposed as social rather than natural, might be wilfully misconstrued as demonstrating a need for protective punishment in the same paradoxical rhetoric that conduct-book writers used. The novel might well deter women from attempting to gain 'independence', 'energy', 'self-respect', until a time when such behaviour was not condemnatory. A pattern of telling has been established which might be as binding as the ideological construct with which the narrative sought to intervene. Mary, herself, can only look forward to a conventional escape through death, despite her own 'unconquerable spirit, bowed but not broken' and her belief in her 'unsullied life' (I, p. iii). Once again, future success is dependent on present failure as:

> ignorance and despotism, combatting frailty with cruelty, may go on to propose partial reform in one invariable, melancholy round; reason derides the weak effort; while the fabric of superstition and crime, extending its broad base, mocks the toil of the visionary projector. (II, p. 232)

The final image is a salutary one. Any vision Mary might have will be of a time after her death. However, the narrative ensures that Mary's experience remains particular, despite the public nature of the discourse. Mary is <u>not</u> representative; she must remain <u>the</u> rather than <u>a</u> victim, much as Wollstonecraft's Maria could not fully encapsulate 'the wrongs of woman'.[64]

Whilst the narrative argues for flexibility in the face of inevitablity, its structure presupposes that such inevitability is fixed. Aspects of the plot convincingly demonstrate the rigidity of Mary's position by augmenting the sense of claustrophobia and oppression

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64 *Mary and the Wrongs of Woman*, ed. by James Kinsley and Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

which Mary experiences. Each time Mary looks forward to her sought-for independence the plot intervenes and refuses her access to this. Similarly, it is mainly through the repetition of her 'story' or 'history' that Mary's problems occur. She suggests that if she, and others, mainly Mr Raymond, had not known her mother's history then her future calamities might have been avoided.

The declamatory style of much of the writing especially surrounding the mother's sense of injustice,[65] and her own doom, reflects Hay's central concern with th e inevitability of her descent as the relentlessness of the rhythm and build up of clauses in the following typical example shows:

> The despotism of man rendered me weak, his vices betrayed me into shame, a barbarous policy stifled returning dignity, prejudice robbed me of the means of independence, gratitude ensnared me in the devices of treachery, the contagion of example corrupted my heart, despair hardened and brutality rendered it cruel. A sanguinary policy precludes reformation, defeating the dear-bought lessons of experience, and, by a legal process, assuming the arm of omnipotence, annihilates the being whom its negligence left destitute, and its institutions compelled to offend (I, p. 168).[66]

The mother's perception of her own imprisonment is being reinforced by her apparent acceptance of a chain of prejudices. Similarly, although Mary confidently refuses to accept the consequences of her rape, the dramatic style again suggests the inevitability of the trap Mary is forced to enter:

> My appearance in his chamber, alike unexpected and extraordinary, -- the hour, the solitude, -- my defenceless situation, -- my confusion, my terror, -- my previous exhaustion, -- the anxiety and fatigue I had sustained during the past week, -- his native impetuosity, heightened by recent scenes of riot and festivity, by surprise, by resistance, -- combined to effect my ruin. Deaf to my remonstrances, to my supplications, -- regardless of my tears, my rage, my despair, -- his callous heart, his furious and uncontrollable vehemence, ------- oh! that I could for ever blot from my remembrance, -- oh! that I could conceal from myself, -- what, rendered desperate, I no longer care to hide from the world! ----- -- I suffered a brutal violation (II, p. 79).

The problem is that as Jane Spencer points out 'by idealizing the heroine as an innocent victim of men and fate, the novel of seduction sometimes reinforced rather than challenged the oppressive ideology of femininity. Ruin could be portrayed as an inevitably tragic destiny rather than an assailable social wrong'.[67] Hays is in an even more fragile position because of the emphasis given to causality in all her writing. Given the form of narrative histories, the inevitable has already been charted and this suggests, if not presupposes, that its chain will continue. In novelistic terms this terminates in the heroine's death, which is what Mary anticipates as a 'welcome and never-ending repose' (I, p. iii). Thus the continuity of the narrative between mother and daughter is both structurally and

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65 See I, pp. 163-64.

66 The *Critical Review* n.s. 26 (1799), pp. 450-52 (p. 451) refers to this passage 'as a specimen of the pathetic sophistry which we have censured'.

67 Spencer, p. 113.

philosophically necessary to point out the social inevitability of the 'fall' awaiting women, and, in Hays's viewpoint, the intervention of causality on life. When Mr Raymond advises Mary to 'preserve the manuscript which contains the fate of your unfortunate mother: [because] I can give you no stronger lesson' he misleads her, as society refuses to allow a lesson to be learnt (II, p. 43); the innocent daughter can never escape the taint of her mother's crime for 'the misfortunes of your birth stain your unsullied youth' (I, p. 171). By insisting on stoical, rational resignation, Mr Raymond, as Mr Francis before, was colluding with the very prejudices he was advising his young charge to reject. As mentors, these men are dubious at best, damaging at worst.

However, an advantage of this narrative form is that more sympathy is directed towards the victim who tells her own tale but, when the outcome is already known, the victim can only remain a victim, and through her own challenge becoming so apparently inefficacious, the reader's involvement in her struggle may be similarly undermined: 'we leave her declining to an early grave, wretched with the sense of her wasted energies and unfruitful talents'.[68] In the daughter's case, the narrative form insists on the ruthlessness of the oppression which she has so patently failed to surmount.

I would also argue that Hays has altered the parameters of 'the novel of seduction' in order to place emphasis on the political aspect of these male/female relationships.[69] In a sense the *Critical Review* is correct in that there were ways back into society but, as Staves and others point out, these ways were acknowledgements of sexual transgression.[70] Mary is neither seduced nor repentant and this position challenges the novel of seduction. I suggest that, because much of the foregrounded 'inevitability' of Mary's victimisation is, perhaps, unfounded or anachronistic, Hays was deliberately manipulating a situation which had become a literary genre into one which could help her focus on the original foundation for this genre becoming necessary. The fiction of ruin has also helped produce the reality of ruin, in the same way as Hays's chosen narrative has. Katherine Rogers points out that, although suspicion of illegitimacy might be a useful narrative device it, 'had to be cleared up by the end of the novel, since a lapse in chastity on her mother's part, would by hereditary influence, have blemished the flawless purity required in the heroine'.[71] Hays turns this convention on its head by deliberately flaunting Mary's inherited 'blemish'

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68 Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 313.

69 For discussion of this genre see especially 'The politics of seduction in English popular culture, 1748-1848' by Anna Clark in *The Progress of Romance* ed. by Jean Radford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986) pp. 47-70; Staves 'British Seduced Maidens'; 'Inhibitions on Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists: Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith' by Katherine M. Rogers 63-78; Spencer, particularly chapter four; Todd *The Sign of Angellica*, particularly Part Three; Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, particularly chapters four and eight.

70 Staves offers an example from the Magdalen Asylum which had by 1786 'admitted 2,415 repentant prostitutes and returned 1,571 to decent places in society'. She quotes from their *Plan:* "That nothing shall be omitted which can promote the great ends of preserving life, of rendering that Life useful, and of recovering those who are now lost to the Community", p. 134.

71 p. 67.

thereby deflecting criticism away from the heroine's 'error' and towards what makes this error prejudicial and specious.

In a similar way, Hays adopts the genre's cliché of aristocratic oppression and deconstructs its demonstration of class struggle back into the more simple one of sexual victimization through which Hays shows how the oppressor-libertine was able to nullify a woman's worth in one brutal movement. This use of 'the myth of seduction' would seem to uphold the established value of chastity which 'accepted that seduction was the worst thing that could happen to a woman, but blamed the upper class for this phenomenon',[72] but, although Hays does utilize the conventional apparatus of position, wealth and power, the oppressor, as the relentless rhythm suggests, is too big and controlling to be Sir Peter, or even the class he represents.[73] The oppressor is chastity itself which, although intended to uphold that class, had been reified into woman herself. Hays attempts to strip chastity of its metaphoric complacency.

It is significant that the young Mary's 'warning' is issued to man, and not woman, as her mother's had been, (and as Hays's was in her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* the previous year) as Mary has been forced to recognise that women are 'bound by chains, of such enormous weight and complicated form, that the more 'they are considered, the less hope remains of being able to unloose them by perseverance, or break through them by force'.[74] Any lesson which might have been learnt from *Memoirs* is illusory whilst the prejudices of society persist, as even Mr Raymond had acknowledged:

> the imperious usages of society, with a stern voice, now command us to pause. Her mandates, often irrational, are, nevertheless, always despotic: contemn them, - the hazard is certain, and the penalty may be tremendous. Some vigorous minds dare to encounter these perils: doubtless, we are indebted to them: they help to shake the fantastic fabric [... however] I wish not to see the name of my girl enrolled in the tragic list either of martyrs or of victims. (I, pp. 72-3)

Merely being, for Mary, constitutes victimization and martyrdom, as she has inherited her stigma and been educated to challenge it in vain. Consequently, she perceives that 'I sink beneath a torrent, whose resistless waves overwhelm alike in a common ruin the guiltless and the guilty' (II, p. 213). Awareness of this 'resistless' nature of the enemy brings despair. It is not until the 'resistless torrent' of a socially-constructed inevitability is perceived by her that Mary loses her defiant attitude towards society and turns to despair,

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72 Anna Clark 'The politics of seduction in English popular culture, 1748-1848', p. 63. The article stresses the novelistic link between wealth and oppression in that 'sentimental novels, gothic novels, radical novels, all featured bourgeois heroines struggling with aristocratic villains. The virtue of the maiden illustrated bourgeois claims to moral and eventually political hegemony while the immorality of the aristocratic seducer shadowed his suitability to rule' (p. 50).

73 Clark claims that Mary's situation is more of a novelistic convention than an expression of reality, arguing that 'very few unmarried mothers or victims of rape had fallen prey to aristocratic villains: the village lass was more likely to be seduced by a village lad than by the squire's son' (p. 49).

74 *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, pp. 70-1.

whereas, the more worldly Sir Peter could immediately and complacently point out to her that 'the stupid prejudices of the world' will forbid her 'honour and character [...] be restored [...] Who would support you against my wealth and influence?' (II, p. 85).[75] Mary would have been making a direct challenge to femininity itself by bringing an action against the aggressor. Such an attitude prevailed well into the late nineteenth century, according to Conley, who cites three counts for raped women to be considered 'suspect': 'they were female, they had been temporarily outside the supervision of male guardians [...], and they were publicly announcing their loss of sexual innocence.'[76] Sir Peter could confidently anticipate that a judge or jury would 'credit the tale you mean to tell' (II, p. 85). Mary is naively trusting in a sense of virtue which has no place in socially determining terms.

Susan Staves demonstrates that it was the father of 'seduced maidens' (a term which would also include rape victims) who might be able to bring a seduction action for 'the loss of her service'.[77] The absence of any father and then of her guardian makes Mary's position not only more vulnerable but also it accentuates her personal wish for redress, as rape was seen as a violation of the father's rights rather than those of the violated. Accusations would be made in the name of the father especially if a lower class woman was involved. This legal position stresses the link between female virtue and property rights; a link which Hays sought to expose as specious. Clearly, it is not Sir Peter but the distortion of chastity which ensures inevitable consequences and which colludes with this helplessness. Sir Peter's offer of marriage might be seen as ideologically magnanimous, as he is agreeing to align himself with a woman who is now unchaste. As Gina Luria points out, 'Mary is a victim of the contract society. Her character and her individual moral worth have no importance to a world in which only material possessions have value'.[78]

Mary refuses to become guilty because she has no guilt, but more important is her refusal to comply with her mother's acceptance of non-readmittance to society. Mary's subsequent attempts challenge the function of chastity itself, which, to succeed as a socially necessary constraint on desire, insists on a recognition by society and the victim, of violation, both physical and social, having taken place. The downward spiral which attaches to her failure is indicative of the inevitability of her ruin, and of the persistence of a society dependent on this inevitability as a deterrent being seen as a necessary part of social

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75 This complacency is confirmed by Anna Clark who points out the paradoxical position of the raped woman: On the one hand, the rapist deserved to be punished because he had attacked female chastity, a valuable possession. On the other hand, the violated woman had lost her credibility as a prosecutrix along with the chastity. It is this paradox which accounts for the low conviction rate for rape: juries hesitated to hang a man for rape on the testimony of a woman who admitted publicly that she was unchaste and therefore unworthy' (p. 47).

76 Conley, p. 95. Conley also quotes an attorney's warning to the House of Commons as late as 1873: '"The more we make a woman feel that she was to look after herself and not yield to inducements to go wrong, the better [...] would it be for the whole female sex. It was not the really virtuous who were ready to expose their shame."'

77 'British Seduced Maidens', 109-134 (p. 128).

78 Luria,'Mary Hays', p. 379.

practice. In terms reminiscent of Godwin's *Caleb Williams* Mary is hunted down as if she carries the guilt of her mother, and Hays points out the similarity in their positions by re-introducing the mother at significant points: Mary's narrative suggesting the repeated pattern of their experience:

> Imaginary terrors, broken recollections, strange phantoms, wild and wandering thoughts, harassed and persecuted me. In some of these terrible moments, the visionary form of my wretched mother seemed to flit before me. One moment, me thought I beheld her in the arms of her seducer, revelling in licentious pleasure: the next, I saw her haggard, intoxicated, self-abandoned, joining in the midnight riot; and, in an instant, as the fantastic scene shifted, covered with blood, accused of murder, shrieking in horrible despair, dragged to the scaffold, sinking beneath the hand of the executioner! Then, all pallid and ghastly, with clasped hands, streaming eyes, and agonizing earnestness, she seemed to urge me to take example from her fate! (II, p. 96)

Hays's obsession with antecedent and consequent, cause and effect, would not allow this inevitability to go unchallenged. Mary's refusal to acknowledge her role within the 'fallen woman' scenario is also a confrontation with social order. Beyond this challenge Hays refused to go: her heroine still met the conventional punishment as due. Moreover, Mary has to accept the fruits of her reasoning, that her conception of causality has contributed to her personal victimization.

It is appropriate that the novel begins with an extract from a conventional discourse: a poem lamenting the inevitable and apparently accepted plight of the seduced. Hays's inclusion of the poem 'Female Seducers' by Jane Elizabeth Moore reinforces the traditional portrayal of the fallen woman as if this representation was, in itself, inevitable:

> Her Trumpet Slander rais'd on high,
> And told the Tidings to the Sky;
> Contempt discharg'd a living Dart,
> A side-long Viper, to her Heart;
> Reproach breath'd Poisons o'er her Face,
> And soil'd and blasted ev'ry Grace;
> Officious Shame, her Handmaid new,
> Still turn'd the Mirror to her View;
> While those, in Crimes the deepest dy'd,
> Approach'd to whiten at her Side.[79]

79 Title page.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

> How much further [...] does a little nature and experience go, than philosophy! (Letter 29).

Hays's letters show us that, in her writings, she was making a systematic attempt to firstly accept, then undermine, the major philosophy of the radical movement produced by William Godwin and substitute the more accommodating congenial one of Helvetius which Godwin had already rejected. Helvetius could provide her with the philosophical vocabulary to confront the inadequacies of a doctrine which had seemed to offer ultimately the same goal of happiness which is 'the only true end of existence' (Letter 22). Hays's personal and philosophical unhappiness made it essential that she interrogate both philosophical positions and trace effects back to causes. She did this by examining her experience for, as she asks, 'on what other foundation can I rest?' (Letter 23). Importantly, she recognised and insisted on others recognising that the Godwinian philosophy was peculiarly inappropriate for women.

Godwin's philosophy, which was based on the rational principle of 'justice', offered less comfort to her than Helvetius's as it seemed to underestimate the injustice of a situation which Hays expressed on behalf of women. Whilst acknowledging, with Helvetius, the power of circumstances, Godwin seemed to ignore that sexual distinction is the first circumstance that mankind meets and that this circumstance had been cajoled into a 'prejudice'. Hays continually foregrounded the injustice of these sexual distinctions which distorted one's search for many of the ingredients of Godwin's discourse: 'virtue', 'truth', 'sincerity'. Her daily life was demonstrating an inoperative philosophical system which was making her more aware of her own failure and which seemed not to make allowances for the very circumstances it declared to be responsible for shaping one's character. As a means of daily living it proved inadequate. Rather, it made sure that would-be radical women would feel less enabled to contribute to radical progress.

Helvetius's philosophy, on the other hand, offered Hays an apologetic excuse for this failure because it directly acknowledged the binding nature of circumstances which would include female education. He had made it philosophically necessary for Hays to heighten her passions, a position which simultaneously coincided with her training in the cult of sensibility, but he did not offer her the means to cope with their disparagement by Godwin, or suggest an alternative outlet when the object of their stimulation, which Hays successfully argued was the only one open to women, was denied her.

Neither philosopher offered a solution to her dilemma, but Helvetius was more accommodating or 'consolatory' (Letter 10), because his philosophy accepted that circumstances could provide the reason for the inferior position which Hays found herself in. He also helped her combat Godwin's diminished concern for women's inferiority

because his system made allowance for their stress on the feelings over the reason, an alternative which Godwin's system disallowed. As Grossman has pointed out 'philosophy in every case is to some extent a rationalization of purposes and methods. It is formulated to justify what one wants to do and the way in which it is to be done'.[1] Hays had recognised this when she accepted that 'the doctrine of Helvetius' was more acceptable to her (Letter 23). She used it to turn her cramped situation into a more dynamic one by showing how she, as a woman, was able to influence the 'whole sensitive and rational creation' by beginning with 'the centre of private affections' (*Memoirs*, II, p.53 and Letter 32).

Hays constantly apologised for the inadequacies of her philosophical engagement, referring to her 'reasoning' as 'weak or unconsequential' (Letter 2) but, whilst paying deference to Godwin's superior thinking she was also anxious to site her inferiority within her inadequate circumstances: 'The education of women, like the boasted polish of the Ancients, extends not beyond the cultivation of the tastes: This, renders a habit of severe investigation and abstract attention difficult to be attain'd' (Letter 2). She used such a circumstance as a challenge to what she saw as an inadequacy in Godwin's overall thinking: 'I will not think that a philosophic reformer can expect to improve one half of the human race, by wilfully assisting in the degradation of the other' (Letter 13). She consistently foregrounded Godwin's lack of engagement with essential female preoccupations.

Both Helvetian and Godwinian philosophies were optimistic in future terms, but Hays was ruthless in her demand that the paradox of future reform be seen as such, and that until the present society saw the necessity of reform (which was a sign of reform already) future optimism was untenable and irrational. Godwin seemed able to ignore this practical consideration. In Hays's experience the lure of future happiness could procure present happiness, but, as she had been educated to perceive this happiness in individual attachment, Godwin's carrot of 'general good' as an inducement to this, was non-applicable. At the same time, Helvetius's vindication of her pursuit of happiness through the passion of love, only served to aggravate her unhappiness when this passion became untrustworthy. His stress on determinism was to further consolidate Hays's awareness of her inadequacies. Neither philosopher showed how this future was to come about so as to secure happiness in the present.

Hays felt that philosophy, the inroad to radical progress, had done her no good: as she wrote in 1796 'I have acquired the power of reasoning on this subject at a dear rate - at the expense of inconceivable suffering' (Letter 20). She reacts strongly because she has been encouraged to perceive women as potentially useful but as persons who have been frustratingly denied access to this contribution:

1 Grossman, p. 54.

> Women, who have too much sense, spirit, and delicacy, to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges, remain insulated beings, and must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great, tho' absurd and often tragical, drama of life. - Hence the eccentricities of conduct with which women of superior [minds have] been accused! the struggles, the despairing, though generous, efforts of an ardent spirit denied a scope for its exertions. The strong feelings and strong energies which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might - ah! what might they not have aided? - forced back, and pent up, ravage and destroy the mind that generated them! (Letter 7)

Hays is insisting that what society might term the eccentric or 'deviant' behaviour of women, such as herself and Wollstonecraft, had an excusable, philosophical foundation. Perhaps more frustrating to Hays was her realisation that she was 'unhappy in proportion as I believe myself (it might be erringly) improved' (Letter 7). Philosophy might have 'improved' her but as the letter continues, it has not brought her the 'only valuable end of existence': happiness. In fact, it has produced the reverse because, although 'philosophy, it is said, should regulate the feelings, [...] it has added fervour to mine'.

It would seem that philosophy was conspiring with social convention in preventing any enablement to be experienced by women. Hays confronts Godwin with the injustice of sexual distinctions just as Emma and Mary's narratives act out these injustices. Women were better off not expanding their reason in the present state of things, and philosophy seemed to suggest little change in their situation because of the paradoxical nature of both Helvetian and Godwinian thinking. Hays is unafraid to foreground her adoption of 'feminine foibles' (Letter 16). On the contrary she tends to exult in her acknowledgement of her 'frailty', turning her position of inferiority into an empowering challenge to its 'injustice'.[2] She acknowledges (but does not accept) the confining situation of women but turns it into a dynamic contribution to what Gary Kelly calls 'progressive domesticity'.[3] Her concept of Godwinian 'utility' enables her to find a philosophic foundation for her desires and thereby Hays offers a distinctly female contribution to the radical position.

Hays based her own philosophy on her experience, and she accepted that this coincided with Helvetius's (see Letter 23). But this was inevitable, even in Godwinian optimistic terms, because her female condition had encouraged her to seek happiness through the feelings, through refined sensibility as her letters to John Eccles clearly reveal. When she later found that her responses were at odds with the new climate of radical reform she sought to excuse herself for her own inadequacy to fulfil its rational requirements (and Helvetius provided this excuse) but, perhaps more importantly, her letters and writings actually show attempts to undermine this unfriendly discourse so that excuse turns into defiance. As early as Letter 10 she demands that 'after destroying my

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2 See Letter 7.

3 *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827*, p. 101.

[philosophy's] fabric, if it indeed be void of foundation, allow me to claim your assistance in erecting one more consistent, more solid, more consolatory!'. This Godwin was unable to do, and Hays's later writing of *Memoirs* turned this into a public debate about an inadequate discourse. When Hays demands her own voice she is making a real case for the validity of individual experience and, as such, offering both a direct challenge to the office of mentor which Godwin had willingly adopted, and a deliberately personal intrusion into his thinking. Her writings show a consistent commitment to her sense of an alternative and I think that Godwin might have been influenced by her to the extent that he readdressed his own absolutist position to include areas of experience which he had largely ignored as irrelevant to his conception of radical progress.

In order to recognise this attitude in her writings, the methodical nature of her direct engagement with philosophy needs to be acknowledged. Ultimately, what Hays explores in her writings is the inadequacy of any philosophical system to help with the direct experience of daily life. As she said in Letter 11, 'Ah! how impotent is mere reasoning against reiterated feeling!'. She refused to accept that Godwin's 'justice' could obliterate these feelings and her writings offer a less sanguine approach to reform because she was basing them on real experience and not theoretical hypotheses. She wrote in old age that:

> I have done with systems. I am a complete and an indifferent skeptic. Nothing appears to me of importance but as it is connected with individual happiness, and all human happiness must have a physical foundation. In attending to the mental and moral education of man this more important aspect seems to have been neglected and forgotten.[4]

Experience had always been her 'system' and experience made her critical of a person so uncompromising as to refer to his principles as being degraded if they were called 'the principles of an individual' (Letter 41). Hays very much wanted to retain the importance of the individual, and believed that for women, at least, the path to this future reform lay through individual affection and the consequent influence arising out of such a personal relationship. Thus Hays was directly confronting the whole ethos of Godwin's philosophy of 'general good'[5] and the subservience of the individual to the general. Hays claimed that women were unable to contribute to this 'general good' because they had not been educated to perceive their role in anything other than individual terms, and that this position had to be recognised as one of the coercive prejudices which was in need of removal. Letter 22 makes this dichotomy clear:

> No, mankind, collectively, are an abstraction to me, which floats in my understanding, but reaches not my heart! You, we will say, are a philosopher, a man of first-rate talents, your writings will live to posterity, and the anticipation of this will console you for present persecution and injustice,

4 Letter from Mary Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, 27 February 1802. Dr Williams's Library.
5 *Political Justice*, I, p. 351.

> shou'd you be call'd to encounter them. I am a woman, I mean by this, that education has given me a sexual character

the latter distinction ensuring that 'I have not the talents for a legislator or a reformer of the world'. Instead, she saw her contribution to this reformation through a female, but equally philosophical, discourse of love.

But Hays goes further than this by continually forcing Godwin to recognise the pernicious nature of a discourse which was itself prejudiced because it did not tolerate the consequences of what it preached about the shaping power of circumstances. In effect it was excluding one half of the human species because circumstances had ensured that they would not find his doctrine congenial to them. Letter 15 suggests that Hays found Godwin's presentation of his principles coercive when she claimed: 'Instruction shou'd fall softly, like a gentle, insinuating, shower of dews: the free mind revolts at the slightest coercive symptoms, on such occasions one is apt pertinaciously to reply - "Am not I, also, a painter?"' hence, forcing him to recognise the legitimacy of her own alternative claims. Hays no longer needed her 'mentor' to instruct her on her experience, and by basing *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* on her own life, she reinforced her intent to make philosophy confront this daily experience by reminding him that 'my story is too real' (Letter 31).

Godwin's revision of his own principles may reflect this constant presentation of an alternative perspective and, whilst commentators have been quick to acknowledge Wollstonecraft's influence on these changes, Hays's role has been either largely ignored or minimized. The letters show her to have forced Godwin to confront the terms of his own discourse consistently throughout the period of their correspondence (see especially Letter 20), and reveal that in person they could similarly expect to enter into philosophical debate. Hays was not reluctant to contradict him, and to point out inadequacies in his philosophy, especially in its application to women and female circumstances. As authors there is evidence that Godwin considered themselves in the same category and that, in fact, he objected to the implications of a consequent loss of femininity implicit in the act of writing itself (see Letter 40), an objection which reinforces Hays's complaint about sexual distinction being a prejudice. Hays was conscious of being positioned as an 'unsex'd female' largely because of her commitment to the radical cause,[6] and in a late letter to Crabb Robinson stressed that:

> it is true, that I have been insulted and ill used by the public, and have been convinced of the folly of desiring literary fame, the accompaniments of which, to a delicate female mind, must ever overbalance its gratification.[7]

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6 See Richard Polwhele, 'The Unsex'd Females'.

7 Letter from Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, 27 February 1802. Dr William's Library.

Perhaps Hays's most consistent argument is the poverty of philosophy to achieve anything except a rational acquiescence. It does not directly intercept daily life except on rational lines, a 'position' which she is convinced is delusory: 'I think still [...] that you do not sufficiently consider the mix'd nature of man, he will never, I doubt, be refined into pure intellect' (Letter 23). In contrast, the feelings are actively engaged with that daily existence and she argues this with confidence because her experience confirms this even as she invites Godwin to counteract it: 'You, who are a philosopher, will you still controvert the sentiment founded in truth and nature?' (Letter 20).[8] She seemed very alert to what Thompson has called the ridiculously inappropriate 'histrionic postures' of the Jacobins, which, as we have seen, link her directly with the anti-Jacobin camp.[9]

Philosophy is acceptable if it helps one deal with daily experience. In Hays's case, and that of her heroines, it only made life worse, and in old age we find Hays referring to 'vain' philosophy because 'to persons of a strong imagination it is very desirable as one illusion fades, to find another and another in endless succession'.[10] If philosophy per se was an effective medium for promoting future reform why did Godwin and Hays need to use the novel form to enable 'the philosopher [... to] calculate the powers of the human mind, and learn the springs which set it in motion'.[11] After all, 'in fitting beings for human society, why should we seek to deceive them, by illusive representations of life?'.[12] Their need suggests that philosophy itself was inadequate to convince mankind to adopt it.

It seems appropriate that someone so bent on projecting herself as a philosopher at the beginning of her life should end it by rejecting all pretensions to such a position. What caused this rejection was philosophy's inability to intervene in the one area of life Hays could call her own: experience. Helvetius had prepared her for this by proclaiming that:

> 'philosophy cannot advance without the staff of experience: it does indeed advance but constantly from observation to observation, and *where observation is wanting it stops*. All that philosophy knows is, that man feels, [and] that he had within him a principle of life [...].[13]

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8 In Letter 26 she playfully points out that, unlike Holcroft, she could not believe that 'weariness is not in the limbs' because 'I feel it, at this moment in mine'.

9 *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 173.

10 Letter from Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, 27 February 1802. Dr William's Library.

11 *Memoirs*, p. xvi. Compare *Caleb Williams*: 'If the author shall have taught a valuable lesson, without subtracting from the interest and passion by which a performance of this sort ought to be characterised, he will have reason to congratulate himself upon the vehicle he has chosen' (p. 1).

12 *Monthly Magazine*, 4 (1797), pp. 180-82 (p. 181).

13 *A Treatise on Man*, I, pp. 96-7.

APPENDIX 1

UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE FROM MARY HAYS TO WILLIAM GODWIN 1794 - 1796

Most of the following letters are housed in the Pforzheimer Collection of New York Public Library. Several of them are reproduced verbatim in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and where appropriate the relevant pages have been interpolated, as have replies from the fictional Mr Francis which may be based on Godwin's missing replies. A few appear in *The Love-Letters of Mary Hays (1779 - 1780)* edited by Hays's great-great-great niece Annie Wedd in 1925.[1] I have only included letters by other correspondents where directly relevant to this study. Unless specified as forming part of the Abinger Collection all Godwin manuscripts are in the Pforzheimer Collection.

Two letters are undated but have been traced as far as possible to appropriate periods in the sequence. Two have conflicting dates and postmarks and have been positioned according to their content. Godwin had a habit or re-using letters as envelopes for his replies.

Hays stopped making fair copies after 6 June 1796 and asked for later letters to be returned in order to write *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and I am assuming that this collection consists of the letters returned directly by Godwin and perhaps by his daughter Mary Shelley after his death. She had also asked William Frend to return her letters as 'they may afford materials for my plan' of producing a 'philosophical delineation of the errors of passion, of the mischiefs of yielding to the illusions of the imagination' but, apparently, he did not comply (see Letter 20). Where they have had a bearing on the unfolding narrative, various published and unpublished letters by interested parties have been inserted. I have not included letters from Mary Wollstonecraft (except Letter 47) or from Eliza Fenwick as these are readily available.[2]

Hays's idiosyncratic spelling and grammar have been retained although, for ease of access, I have spelt out ampersands and utilized [sic] in the main body of the thesis. I have only included words which had been crossed through if they made a difference to the sense of the argument. Where traceable the originals of her quotations have been supplied. Many of the letters are extremely difficult to decipher as they are densely packed in tiny handwriting which Charles Lamb referred to as her 'all-of-the-wrong-side sloping hand'.[3]

Hays was proud of her correspondent's attention, and she confesses in Letter 29 that she liked the idea that 'a great philosopher interests himself in my prattle', a notion which

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1 There are some minor differences between the manuscripts and their transcription in *Love-Letters*.

2 See *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* ed. by Wardle; *Godwin and Mary* ed. by Wardle; *The Fate of the Fenwicks* ed. by A.F.Wedd.

3 Letter from Charles Lamb to George Dyer. See Lucas, III, p. 305.

Godwin encouraged by asking her 'to write to me, when your mind is bursting with thought, at random as you would to your genius in the moon' (see Letter 5).

During this period Hays moved from Paragon Place, Surry Road, in the Blackheath area of London, and then to Kirby Street, Hatton Garden. Godwin lived at 25, Chalton Street. During this period Hays was instrumental in re-introducing Godwin to her friend Mary Wollstonecraft. The final letters from Godwin reveal the extent of the rift between the two correspondents after Wollstonecraft's death.

After Godwin's death in 1836 Hays requested that her letters be returned and it would appear that his daughter Mary Shelley complied with this 'most reasonable request'.[4]

However, Mary Shelley's following remarks have been unheeded:

"There is nothing more detestable or cruel than the publication of letters meant for one eye only."[5]

I hope that provision of wider access to the letters will be seen as an act of celebration and vindication rather than of cruelty.

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[4] See *Love-Letters* pp. 246-47.

[5] ibid., p. 247.

Letter 1: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

Perhaps no apology could be equally proper for a stranger addressing Mr Godwin, & presuming to solicit a favor, as a plain statement of the truth! Disgusted with the present constitutions of civil society, an observance of which the storms which have lately agitated the political hemisphere has forced upon every mind not absolutely sunk in apathy or absorbed in selfishness, the writer of this has been roused from a depression of spirits, at once melancholy & indignant, by an attention to the "few puissant & heavenly endowed spirits, that are capable of guiding, enlightening, & leading the human race onward to felicity!"[2] Among these, fame has given a distinguished place to the Author of "Political Justice".[3] Contrary to the assertions of some really liberal & respectable writers - That the human mind, like the pendulum of a clock, will continue to move backward & forward, without ever exceeding a certain boundary - the author of this justly celebrated work is said to have supported, with equal perspicuity of language & strength of reasoning, the noble, the cheering hypothesis of the progressive improvement & ultimate perfection of the human mind.

My ardor for the perusal of this work was first excited by a copious analysis in the anylitical Review;[4] next, by the testimony, among many others, of a respected friend, Mr Wm Frend late of Cambridge, who writing to me on this subject says - "I am at present in the chambers of a friend & have again a decent shew of books around me.[5] My attention has however been chiefly arrested by Godwin on Political justice. The first hundred pages please me exceedingly &, if he continues in the same manner, I might almost venture to presage that his book will in a few years operate as great a change in the political sentiments

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1 Addressed from No 2 Paragon Place - Surry Road. Surry Road no longer exists but Paragon Place is in the Blackheath area of London over the river at Greenwich. Hays moved here sometime between January 1793 and July 1794 from Gainsford Street, Horseley Down, Southwark, where her mother still lived. In *Love-Letters*, pp. 227-29.

2 The quotation reads: 'Few indeed are those puissant and heavenly endowed spirits that are capable of guiding, enlightening, and leading the human race onward to felicity!' See Thomas Holcroft *Anna St Ives* (1792), (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 481. Future references are to this edition. Hays consistently mistranscribed quotations.

3 The first edition had been published by George Robinson in February 1793.

4 The monthly *Analytical Review* was jointly published by the Unitarian Joseph Johnson and Thomas Christie from May 1788 until December 1798. *Political Justice* was reviewed favourably in June and August 1793. The unsigned review concludes 'the plan of this multifarious inquiry Mr G. seems to have sufficiently digested, and the execution is, on the whole, entitled to approbation. [...] The value of the sentiments will be variously appreciated. For our part, we bear this testimony, that among several extravagant and Utopian ideas, we have found much close argument, judicious observation, and profound thought. If his ardent enthusiasm in favour of truth and liberty, with a sanguine anticipation of the perfection of human nature, have betrayed Mr G. into a few extraordinary and chimerical positions, though we may be disposed to smile at their singularity and extravagance, we can scarce censure the principle in which they originate. His morality is bold and imperious: if in any instance it be either impracticable or inconsistent, it seems to be in his doctrine of sincerity. [...] We conclude our remarks with observing, that the author discovers considerable talents, a clear intellect, and an ardent mind in the pursuit of truth'. See *Analytical Review*, 16 (1793), pp. 121-30, and pp. 388-404.

5 William Frend 1757-1841. Their relationship had begun in 1792 after he had written admiringly to "Eusebia", the authoress of *Cursory Remarks*, published that year. See copy in *Love-Letters*, pp. 220 - 22. This is the first direct reference to their relationship in the correspondence.

of our nation as Lockes famous treatise on government."[6] - To gratify this curiosity I had recourse, but in vain, to various circulating libraries, being informed that the work was too expensive for their purposes; & I will frankly confess that the same cause rendered it inconvenient for me to purchase it, which otherwise I should most chearfully have done.[7] I have since applied to several of my friends & acquaintance, but without success.

Very lately my curiosity has received an additional stimulus from perusing Mr Godwins Memoirs of Caleb Williams; [8] to which originality, force, & genius, combine to give an interest far exceeding the generality of publications of this nature : The affecting struggles between prejudice & principle in the finely sketched character of Falkland; the artless, simple, pathetic tale of Emily Melville; the soul harrowing catastrophe of the unfortunate Hawkins, the protracted persecutions & sufferings of the intrepid & ingenuous Caleb Williams - alternatedly excited in my mind a sensibility almost convulsive! Hurried along by the interesting & impassioned narrative, I had scarcely time, till a second perusal, to pay a proper attention to the variety of excellent remarks, political & moral, with which these Memoirs abound, the accurate knowledge of the mechanism of the human understanding which they display, with the too just & melancholy reflection which pervades them. - "Of what use are talents & sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank & rotten soil from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. All that in a happier field & a purer air would expand into virtue & giminate into general usefulness, is thus converted into henbane & deadly nightshade."[9]

May then a disciple of truth, & a contemner of the artificial forms which have served but to corrupt & enslave society, request of Mr Godwin himself to be allowed an opportunity of investigating further the important & interesting subjects of moral truth & political justice?

I must not say that I will promise to preserve the books with care & return them with punctuality[10] - but I will assure Mr G that from the first dawnings of reason, amid all the disadvantages of worse than neglected, perverted, female education, the governing principles of my mind have been an ardent love of literature & an unbounded reverence for truth & genius. I can with enthusiasm adopt the sentiment of a modern ingenuous writer (who is at present suffering the penalty which virtue & talents, the only just objects of fear

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6 John Locke published *Two Treatises of Government* in 1690, in which he opposes the theory of the divine rights of kings and justifies the Glorious Revolution.

7 Apparently, the first quarto edition cost thirty-six shillings 'not three guineas, as in early versions of the story - and fourteen shillings for the later octavo editions' See *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 150. Its cost was thought too prohibitive to warrant prosecution.

8 Published in 1794 and titled *Things As They Are*, it was 'a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world'. F, EM, CW refer to Falkland, Emily Melville and Caleb Williams. Subsequent references are to *Caleb Williams* ed. by D. McCracken.

9 Taken from the novel's Postscript, pp. 325-26. Hays later uses this expression to sum up her own experience. See Letter 33.

10 Hays is probably alluding to Godwin's passage on promises in *Political Justice*, I, pp. 150-56, where he argues that promises demand obedience and are, hence, coercive unless governed by the principle of justice.

to a corrupt government, have ever suffered in perilous times)[11] "What is there precious but mind? And when mind, like a diamond of uncommon growth, exceeds a certain magnitude, calculation cannot find its value."[12] These associations have mechanically produced in my mind a thirst after books & a sense of their value - I have been obliged to incurr various obligations of this nature, & I can say, with strict sincerity, that my friends have never once had cause to repent their liberality, or to distrust either my care or my integrity.

If Mr G should think proper to signify by a line his compliance with my request, I will send a person for the work where ever he shall please to appoint & return it punctually when perused.

Mary Hays

Oct^{br} 14th 1794 No 2 - Paragon Place - Surry Road

11 Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809), playwright and novelist, was arrested for treason in May but acquitted in November. He was an intimate friend of Godwin from 1788 to 1805 when they became estranged but were reconciled at Holcroft's deathbed.

12 Thomas Holcroft, *Anna St Ives*, p. 481.

Letter 2: HAYS TO GODWIN

I have perused the book you obligingly put into my hands with avidity & attention: Were I to attempt to point out all the reasonings sentiments which it excited in my mind, my letter might swell to a volume. In every page my respect for the author increased! The influence of political institution on the virtue happiness of mankind - The causes which have impeded the progress of society - The inseparable connection between virtue intellect -The strong analogous argument, taking a retrospective view of what has been done in favor of what yet may be atcheived - The wise & benevolent recommendation of the gradual diffusion of knowledge, like a soft & plentiful shower of dews, imperceptibly fructifying the sterile soil, & preparing it for future abundant harvests - The energetic reasoning in favor of intrepid, unequivocal, sincerity - The comprehensive signification of the term justice superceding, strictly speaking, every other definition of virtue - The absolute evil of every description of government, with the comparitive obligation of making choice of that which may be the least adverse, the least sophisticated, the most simple; that which in the fewest cases would interfere with the most sacred of all duties, the duty of exercising private, individual, judgement, & of acting upon its decisions, the only disposition deserving the name of virtuous, the only one by which the faculties can acquire health & vigor - The abstract & uniform nature of rectitude, with the distinction proper to be observed between a good disposition & right action - The artificial, consequently enervated, state of society, as at present constituted; the palsy, if I may so express myself, of false refinement, requiring to be roused from its apparent morbid state by the electrical force of genius, by those persevering determined minds which are only stimulated by obstacles, & before whom ultimately, when clad in the armour of truth, every obstacle must give way - These, with a variety of other propositions, appear'd to me demonstrative as the theorems & problems of Euclid, requiring only patience to follow the series, & comprehension to take in the result, to ensure conviction![1]

Yet, after this, will you allow me to say, though it may be in saying it I shall give a proof of my own weakness inconsistency, that the feelings of my heart sometimes revolted against the decisions of my judgement: & that notwithstanding I had multiplied sorrows in the indulgence of private affections, I started at the idea of their annihilation,

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1 Hays had been studying Euclid systematically earlier in the year. Hugh Worthington writes to her, 'You have done wonders in geometry. both as to extent and to dispatch. Mathematics were always my delight, and you will find them a great relief to the mind. Excuse my saying, they have a certainty of demonstration. Letter Worthington to Hays, 17 January 1794. Dr Williams's Library. However, Godwin undermines the reliability of Euclid in *Political Justice*, I, pp. 123-24, by claiming that:

> You inform me, "that Euclid asserts the three angles of a plane triangle to be equal to two right angles," Still I am unaquainted with the truth of this proposition. "But Euclid has demonstrated it. His demonstration has existed for two thousand years, and during that term has proved satisfactory to every man by whom it has been understood". I am nevertheless uninformed. The knowledge of truth lies in the perceived agreement or disagreement of the terms of a proposition. So long as I am unaquainted with the middle term by means of which they may be compared, so long as they are incommensurate to my understanding, you may have furnished me with a principle from which I may reason truly to farther consequences, but as to the principle itself I may strictly be said to know nothing about it.

& could not but regard them as the centre of humanity from whence embracing a wider, & still wider, circle, emanated that sublimer sympathy which acknowledges no other limits than those of animated nature.[2] I will also confess, that considering man as a sensitive as well as rational animal, I felt inclined to attribute the hypothesis of the entire subjection of the former to the latter to the noble enthusiasm of genius, warm'd by contemplating the glowing enchantments of its own magic pencil![3]I also hesitated, where virtue is affirmed to be happiness, consequently the most virtuous the most happy. I am aware that this proposition is as a corollary to the former: But does observation experience demonstrate its truth? Does it not require powers to which the mix'd nature of man is inadequate? Virtue is undoubtedly a means, of which happiness is the end! But may not other causes, causes without us, intervene to prevent its full effect? Corn, generally speaking, is nutritive to animal life but in particular cases, from some counteracting principle, may fail of this effect. We know nothing of causes (says Mr Hume) but from their effects, & are those effects at all times invariable?[4] Strong passions, or a capacity of receiving lively impressions, are said to accompany strong mental powers. We may thank for almost every stable principle (says an admirable writer) the force of our passions, permitted to overleap the boundaries of content.[5] It was happily observed, by a deceased & respected friend of mine, that the

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2 Suggestive of Pope's ever-increasing circles of benevolence in 'An Essay on Man', *Epistle IV* 363 - 72. Hays is referring to *Political Justice* I, p. 87, where Godwin argues that 'private affections' interfere with 'justice' and are coercive. This is the famous Fenelon example where Godwin argues that 'the same justice, that binds me to any individual of my fellow men, binds me to the whole. If, while I confer a benefit upon one man, it appear, in striking an equitable balance, that I am injuring the whole, my action ceases to be right and becomes absolutely wrong'.

3 Although Godwin revised *Political Justice* in 1795 and 1797 he had intended to make major revisions to embrace the 'domestic and private affections', See his Preface to *St Leon* (1799) (London: Colbourn and Bentley, 1831), pp. ix-x, where he anticipates that 'some readers of my graver productions will perhaps, in perusing these little volumes, accuse me of inconsistency; the affections and charities of private life being everywhere in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* they seemed to be treated with no degree of indulgence and favour. In answer to this objection, all I think it necessary to say on the present occasion is, that, for more than four years, I have been anxious for opportunity and leisure to modify some of the earlier chapters of that work in conformity to the sentiments inculcated in this. Not that I see cause to make any change respecting the principle of justice, or any thing else fundamental to the system there delivered; but that I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them. True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments; for with them our minds are more thoroughly maintained in activity and life than they can be under the privation of them; and it is better that man should be a living being, than a stock or a stone'.

4 Hays shows a superficial understanding of Hume's ideas, apparently ignoring his avowal that causal necessity is an arbitrary connection and that 'every effect is a distinct event from its cause'. See *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd edn, rev. by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 29.

5 See Helvetius, *De 'Esprit*, p. 152: 'Passions are in the moral, what motion is in the natural world. [...] It is therefore to strong passions that we owe the inventions and wonders of arts; and consequently they are to be considered as the germ productive of genius, and the powerful spring that carries men to great actions.'

rock must be convulsed ere it produce the diamond.[6] Symptoms of such convulsion I think I can trace even in the calm philosophical principles of the author of political justice! Habits of effervescence, destructive of tranquillity, without constant watchfulness are every moment on the point of being renew'd: The necessity of this watchfulness implies arduous conflict, & without conflict, it has been asserted there can be no virtue. May not the victory, if ever completely attain'd, cost us so dear, be atcheiv'd so late, that the race of life is finish'd by the time we arrive at the goal? If this be often the case, & if virtue, indeed, point to happiness as its end - does not this unveil a cheering prospect of future, fairer, systems, preparatory for which the present, to borrow a trite idea, is as education, the first step in an infinite series?

These questions I think I may with propriety address to you: your system of intellectual, opposed to material, mechanism, awaken'd in my mind some interesting enquiries. Thought, you say, is the medium, the origin, of even the simplest morion! How do you define thought &, traced to final causes, where does the definition tend? I have met with some persons who professing to have read your writings, appear to me not to have given a fair statement of them: I have, I think, already detected the fallacy of some of these partial observers, & my suspicions extend yet further. I may have over-rated my own discernment! However this may be, I honor the man who dares intrepidly follow truth wherever it thinks it may lead: This if not, strictly, virtue is the next step to it, a virtuous disposition: Such a disposition I hope I have manifested, however weak or unconsequential may be my reasoning! The education of women, like the boasted polish of the Ancients, extends not beyond the cultivation of the taste: This renders a habit of severe investigation & abstract attention difficult to be attain'd - But though failing a thous times, I am not of a disposition to give up anything as impracticable. I have ever eagarly embraced, & endeavour'd to make the most of, every opportunity of improvement, because I have found in the exercise of my understanding the only means of stilling the importunate suggestions of a too exquisite sensibility - foster'd by the delicacy of female education, & those habits of privacy & retirement which afford the imagination too much leisure to seduce by its enchantments, or subdue by its imperious tyranny! I ask, with confidence, your assistance! If you think me capable of understanding & of profiting by your conversation, I trust in your principles that I shall not ask it in vain! From you I shall expect truth, truth which by sexual prejudices, voluptuous impertinent precautions, has hitherto been prevented, like the winds of heav'n, from visiting us too roughly! "I have been in the habit of flattering women (says

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6 Robert Robinson who died in 1790. Compare his comments on 'the advantages of early affliction' and 'the latent powers of their own minds unknown, diamonds in rocks unconvulsed!' in *Letters and Essays*, p. 89. The phrase is also quoted in her article 'Are Mental Talents Productive of Happiness?', in the *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p 358.

Mr H Tooke on his trial) but I will not flatter men."[7] "Women (on another occasion are rhetorically asserted by Mr Sheridan) to have most strength in their weakness."[8] "Opinion (is declared by Rousseau) to be their throne, but the grave of men".[9] All the indignation, the honest scorn, which a Necessarian may be allow'd to feel, these insulting paradoxes have excited in my mind. I own myself weak - frequently very weak - but I trace it to a different source. Let not those who, with barbarous usurpation, have endeavour'd by brute force to monopolize the cheif good - knowledge - aggravate injustice by contempt: Or let them recollect, to humble a pride so mean, how long the boasted reason of man has been held in subjection by the wiles of the interested & the tyranny of prejudice to prescription! I shou'd not have retain'd the volume I now return, with unfeign'd acknowledgements, so long, but from the wish of making a sister, who resides not with me but with whom I have long been united in habits of strict friendship from a similarity of mind principle, a participater of the satisfaction experienc'd from the perusal.[10] I will not make any apology, because I do not conceive it necessary, to Mr Godwin, for the frankness with which I have express'd myself. I hope by the Bearer of this to be favour'd with the second volume, which I await with some degree of impatience. I am with esteem respect your obliged &c.

Mary Hays

No 2. Paragon Place - Surry Road Dec^{er} 7th -94

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7 John Horne Tooke (1736-1812). He was one of three brought to trial for treason in 1794. Holcroft refers to Horne Tooke's 'equivocatory falsehoods'. See *The Memoirs of the late Thomas Holcroft*, ed. by William Hazlitt, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), III, p. 78.

8 Probably Richard Brinsley Sheridan 1751 - 1816 who was a 'figure of some importance in the political as well as in the literary world; a prominent M.P. attached to the party of Fox'. See Allene Gregory, *The French Revolution and the English Novel* (London: Putnam, 1915), p. 290. Compare 'her strength is in her charms, by their means she should compel him to discover and use his strength [...] this is the origin of attack and defence, of the boldness of one sex and the timidity of the other, and even of the shame and modesty with which nature has armed the weak for the conquest of the strong', by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman's Library, 1911), p. 322.

9 '"What will people think" is the grave of a man's virtue and the throne of a woman's,' *Emile*, p.328. Also quoted in Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ed. by Kramnick, p. 242.

10 Possibly her sister known as 'Sister Dunkin'. See *Love-Letters*, p. 15. The family of Dunkin had been worshipping at St Olave's Church, Southwark since at least 1652.

Letter 3: HAYS TO GODWIN

Never did I peruse a work with greater earnestness & pleasure, nor arrive at the conclusion with more unaffected regret, than the enquiry into the principles of political justice! I seem'd on shutting the book, to be banish'd from a world of benevolence & wisdom, which I had contemplated with an interest so lively as almost to realise it, & to be obliged to return to "things as they are",[1] to a state of society at which my sick heart has invariably recoil'd & must still continue to recoil. Ah! Is virtue indeed happiness condemned, as at present, to struggle against the vices & prejudices of others? How little virtue have I then to boast! This must surely be the subject on which you candidly tell me you had anticipated my objections & are already half a convert: For exquisite organization bespeaks keen susceptibility - & I cannot but suspect that the powers & energy of a mind like yours must have been "roused" & strengthen'd by adversity - adversity which, you justly say, however awakening is in reality an evil.[2] It has been said, Enquire after the sufferings of great men, & you will know why they are great.[3] "There is some soul of good in things evil would men observingly distil it out."[4] One of the best & wisest of men, we are told, was a man of sorrows & acquainted with grief.[5] If my conjectures are well founded, the objection which I before urged receives additional weight from the conclusion of the second volume:[6] For where is the justice, that so many generations should toil, struggle & suffer, ultimately to assure the felicity of a favoured few, who shall at length reap, without labor, the harvest nourished with the tears & blood of countless millions? Benevolence the most disinterested must surely pause here & reconsider - Is this all the solution that can be given when we ask - "Why the good man's share
In life, was gall & bitterness of soul?
Why heav'n born truth & moderation fair
Wore the red marks of superstitions scourge?"

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1 Hays is demonstrating her awareness of Godwin's novel.

2 The young Hays was an enthusistic supporter of those 'whose souls are replete with sensibility, whose sentiments are refined, and those who are tremblingly susceptible of every softer emotion, - they drink deep of the cup of misfortune, and are practised in the school of adversity.' *Love-Letters*, p. 29. Godwin saw this as erroneous because based on injustice. See *Political Justice*, II, pp. 384-85.

3 Also quoted by Hays in *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 358.

4 See *Letters and Essays*, p. 88, 'My revered and deceased friend Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, writing to me on the advantages of early affliction, observes "that, before he met with it in Shakespeare, he had been convinced that -

"There was some soul of good, in things evil,
"Would men observingly distil it out."

Compare *Henry V* 4/1/4.

5 Isaiah 53.3.

6 See *Political Justice*, II, p. 788, where Godwin argues against the injustice of inequality of property:

> The subject of property is the keystone that completes the fabric of political justice. According as our ideas respecting it are crude or correct, they will enlighten us as to the consequences of a *simple form of society without government*, and remove the prejudices that attach us to complexity. There is nothing that more powerfully tends to distort our *judgment* and *opinions*, than erroneous notions concerning the goods of fortune. Finally the period that shall put an end to the system of *coercion* and *punishment*, is intimately connected with the circumstance of property's being placed on an equitable basis.

The chapter ends optimistically, as the removal of such injustice will aid 'the gradual consequences of this revolution of opinion' (II, p. 891).

Is this all the consolation that can be offered to "The good distrest, the noble few!
Who here unbending stand beneath life's pressure."
You will pardon me, for you have encouraged me to speak freely, & the respect with which your superior reason has impress'd my mind is meliorated by the recollection of that candor & benevolence which pervades every page of the admirable work on which I am venturing to descant: had I approved with less ardor of its general principles, I should have felt less solicitous of seeing every difficulty removed. One of my former objections I already begin to suspect originated in misconception. Friendship is indeed the balm of life, but if founded on its proper bases, the conviction of real worth, will undoubtedly become less individual - more diffusive - with the diffusion of those principles which give it birth. Perhaps I am not yet quite so sanguine respecting the future triumph of mind as the philosophers whom I most unfeignedly revere, but while the mists of prejudice veil our sight & we stumble in darkness, it would indeed be presumption to pretend, with rash hand, to limit the glorious prospects existing, it may be in endless perspective, beyond the boundaries of our scanty & cloudy horizon. These prejudices, I confess, have lost much of their force since reading the work entire, in all its parts, & tracing the principles as they arise in a just & beautiful gradation from the only theory which affords a proper foundation for mental & moral researches - the theory of moral necessity.[7]

But I forbear to enlarge, you have given me the hope, by which I am much gratified, of farther conversation with you: For this patience & candor, may I be permitted to say, I am grateful? Could you make it convenient to take a family dinner with us, literally so, for the epicurism of reason is the only epicurism we cherish - & would favor me with previous notice, I shou'd have an opportunity of making a Brother & Sister participators in the satisfaction I promise myself. But at all times I can sincerely assure Mr Godwin I shall be happy to see him, I am seldom from home, unless when walking for health & exercise, & am never denied.[8] The love of distinction is, you say, an universal passion[9] - mine is never so truly gratified as by the notice & esteem of the wise & worthy.

Mary Hays

Jan^{ry} 1st. 1795. No 2. Paragon Place - Surry Road

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7 Her brother John and sister Elizabeth were still living with Hays and her mother at Paragon Place.

8 Hays is alluding to the section in *Political Justice*, I, pp. 265-71, where Godwin condemns the custom of 'excluding visitors' by pretending not to be at home.

9 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 80-91.

Letter 4: HAYS TO GODWIN

No 2. Paragon Place - Surry Road May 6th 1795

The last time I had the pleasure of seeing you in Paragon Place, I fear I was a little troublesome. I wanted, with an impatience (I was going to say natural) habitual to my temper, to gain information on every subject at once, & almost harassed you, I believe, with desultory questions:[1] By which means I defeated by an over solicitude, as I fancy is often the case, the purpose on which I was intent. For of the multiplicity of ideas which had rapidly succeeded each other in my mind, there were but few that I could clearly retrace. A variety of circumstances have tended to excite in my mind an inexpressible ardor for the acquisition of knowledge, an ardor approaching the limits of pain; for my attainments bear no proportion to my desires: & frequently, when conceiving that I have gained an arduous height, my thoughts recoil, like the fabled stone of Sysyphus, & sink back into old habits & prejudices, I perceive that I have not in reality advanced a single step.[2] In seasons of despondency, which but too often recur, I am sometimes inclined to think that every wise man will at length conclude with Solomon - That all is vanity & vexation of spirit.[3] (excuse this short quotation, I am not unmindful of your reproof!) So convinced am I, that virtue is not in itself happiness, for ah! how many painful sacrifices does it frequently require of us! that I own this life appears to me, while struggling with wayward passions & exhausted by vain pursuits, an inexplicable enigma - if I must conclude it to be the whole of our existence. How can I suppose that so fine a mind as yours, after combating a few years with the vices & follies of mankind, perhaps with but little effect - 'Nothing (said a gentleman & a scholar with whom I was in company a few days since) is so weak as truth, except virtue & religion'.[4] - Can I believe (I repeat) that a mind elevated & benevolent as yours, after spending itself, it may be, in vain endeavours to reform & enlighten others - its arduous efforts repelled by ignorance, by interest, by pertinacity, by gross & sordid self love - will in a few years become extinct? A sudden stop put to all its enquiries, its improvements cut short ere they arrive at maturity: the body still surviving in the various changes to which matter is subject! But the intellect, with all its sublime conceptions, its acute & comprehensive powers, annihilated - a word that conveys no idea. You will again smile & tell me to confine my researches within the sober limits of experience, & not attempt to explore what is unsearchable: but I cannot persuade myself that there may not be many analogical reasonings in favor of my hypothesis - of the existence of a Supreme Power, & the probability of a future state of being. After reading the enquiry into the principles of political justice, could have admitted for a moment, that a work so conceived & arranged

1 See his reply, Letter 5.

2 Sisyphus whose "punishment in the world of the Shades was to roll a huge stone up a hill to the top. As it constantly rolled down again just as it reached the summit, his task was everlasting'. See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 14th edn, p. 1024.

3 Ecclesiastes 1. 14.

4 Possibly William Frend with whom she was friendly with after 1794.

have been produced by a fortuitous concourse of printers by [ ] contemplating the fair characters of the universe, rising in order [ ] with the expanding capacity, why should I not trace [ ] so impressed with intelligence, to an intelligent cause? I do not contend for the God of the priest, nor of the vullgar: but every effect bespeaks an adequate cause! If matter cannot communicate motion to itself, must there not be a moving power? Infinite (as we term it) power & intelligence includes the idea of infinite justice or goodness. The views of such a Being cannot terminate on evil: & individual restoration, happiness, & perfection, if my arguments have any force, follow as a corollary. I am aware that it is impossible to reason on such a subject without being guilty of (what shall I say?) anthropomorphisism: But, addressing so acute a mind, I need not be solicitous about words, your ready apprehension will easily disentangle my meaning from any obscurity of phraseology, I have probably been only repeating what I have said before, but the subject is an interesting one to me -, not withstanding your dislike of [quotation], you will perhaps excuse me!

There is another topic on which I recollect, my ideas did not quite accord with yours: which I will only just touch upon. I observed that many things that we call evil might in reality be beneficial to us: as also, on the contrary, others which we conceive to be desirable might prove ultimately pernicious & destructive. Is not this the natural consequence of ignorance? For to what, according to your own system, is owing all our vices & miseries, but to our mistakes?[5] The wretched corruptions which deform society were originally the erring choice (from motives at that time irresistible) of man: Hence we still groan under them, & shall continue to do so, till we gain sufficient discernment & strength to perceive & dissolve the enchantment. If we were never again to desire what was prejudicial, nor reject what was really salutary, the work of reformation wou'd be accomplished. But I have perhaps misconceived you & may be combating a self-created phantom! I confess I did not feel perfectly self possessed during the conversation I allude to, because, when inclined to differ, I was too conscious of inferiority.

Mr Frend, Mr Dyer[6] & one or two more friends have engaged to drink tea with me any day after Wednesday in next week (except Sunday) that may be most convenient to Mr Godwin to join our party: May I hope to be favoured with a line from Mr G, naming the day; that will best suit him (nothing more important interfering)?

I am respectfully &c

Mary Hays

NB a few days previous notice will be esteemed a favor.

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5 According to Godwin error is responsible for evil but may be overcome by the use of reason. See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 19-32. This is clarified in the second edition, I, p. 81: 'There is no conduct, in itself reasonable, which the refutation of error, and dissipating of uncertainty, will not make appear to be such.'

6 George Dyer 1755 - 1841 with whom Hays corresponded during 1792 - 97, and from whom Hays received Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in June 1792. See *Love-Letters*, p. 5.

Letter 5: GODWIN TO HAYS

What day can you imagine I would choose next after Wednesday, but Thursday? On Thursday (May 14), if agreeable therefore, & nothing uncommon intervene, you shall see me.

I always admire your letters, &, when I read them, am sorry that invincible circumstances preclude me from having often the pleasure of seeing you. I am sorry too, that the nature of my avocations restrain me from entering into regular discussions in the epistolary mode. To ask you to write to me, when your mind is bursting with thought, at random as you would to your genius in the moon, would be an unreasonable demand; but, if it were not unreasonable, I would ask it.

I was not aware, when I was last at your house, of any such fault in you as you describe, & did not feel myself harrassed with questions.

W Godwin

Somers Town
May 7 1795

Letter 6: HAYS TO GODWIN

How much is a favour enhanced by a ready & obliging compliance! Oh yes! thursday will undoubtedly be agreeable, & I shall anticipate, with unfeigned satisfaction the greatest of all luxuries, a feast of reason.

Encouraged by a frankness & candor so truly flattering, I shall in future, occasionally, avail myself of your friendly invitation, & my bewildered mind shall seek from you, as its tuterary genius, a solution to the difficulties which entangle & the doubts which oppress it.

I have heard, with concern, from Mr Frend of the accident which has lately befallen you, yet I rejoice, unpleasant as were its consequences, that they were no worse, the concussion of a brain so organized would have been a general & public loss.[1]

Mary Hays

No 2 - Paragon Place
Surry Road

May 10 - 95

1 There is no mention of such an accident in Godwin's Journal or Diary.

Letter 7: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

July 28th. No 2 Pagagon Place - Surry Road

If it were not unreasonable (you have said) I would ask you, when your mind was full of thought, to write to me as you would to your genius in the moon! I am sensible of the distinction which this permission implied & I have several times been about to avail myself of it, but have endeavoured to repress the inclination as it arose - for to what purpose should I trouble you with a thousand wayward, contradictory, ideas & emotions, which I am myself unable to disentangle, which have perhaps floated in every mind that has had leisure for reflection, which are distinguished by no originality, & which I may express, though not feel, without force? I sought to cultivate my understanding & exercise my reason that, by adding variety to my resources, I might encrease the number of my enjoyments, for happiness is, surely, the only desirable end of existence! But when I ask myself whether I am yet nearer to the end proposed? I dare not deceive myself - sincerity obliges me to answer in the negative. I daily perceive the gay & the frivolous, among my sex, amused with every passing trifle, gratified by the insipid routine of, if I may so express myself, mindless, heartless, intercourse, & fully occupied, at intervals, alternately by domestic avocations & the vanity of varying external ornaments & 'hanging drapery on a smooth block'[2] I do not affect to despise, & regularly practise, the necessary employments of my sex, neither am I superior to their vanities: the habits acquired by early precept & example adhere tenaciously & are never, perhaps, entirely erradicated . - But all these are insufficient to engross, to fill up, the active, aspiring mind! Hemmed in, on every side, by the constitutions of society & not less so, it may be, by my own prejudices, I perceive, indignantly perceive, the magic circle, without knowing how to dissolve the spell! - While men pursue honor, pleasure, interest & ambition, as accords with their several dispositions - Women, who have too much sense, spirit, & delicacy, to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges, remain insulated beings, & must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great, tho' absurd & often tragical, drama of life. - Hence the eccentricities of conduct with which women of superior [minds have] been accused! the struggles, the despairing, though generous, efforts of an ardent spirit denied a scope for its exertions. The strong feelings & strong energies which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might - ah! what might they not have aided? - forced back, & pent up, ravage & destroy the mind that generated them! Yes, I confess, I am unhappy, because perhaps, I overrate myself - unhappy in proportion as I believe myself (it may be erringly) improved. Philosophy, it is said, should regulate the feelings, but it has added fervour to mine -

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1 Compare *Memoirs* I. Chapter 26, reproduced as Letter 7A.

2 Mary Wollstonecraft. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ed. by Kramnick, p. 258: 'Fitting drapery upon a smooth block.'

What are passions, but another name for powers?[3] The mind susceptible of improvement, from whatever causes, either moral or physical, is the mind having capabilities of receiving forcible impressions; such minds, into whatever trains they are thrown by outward circumstances, are prone to enthusiasm. 'Those are fools (said Dr Priestley to me one day[4]) who will be taught only in the school of experience.' - This taken in one sense, & perhaps in every sense is a mistake, The weak & the timid, from the first failure [are pre] vailed on to relinquish their pursuits, but the bold & the persevering frequently derive from repeated disappointment, even in visionary plans new ardor! I feel that I am writing in a desultory manner, that I am unable to crowd my ideas into the compass of a letter, & that, could I do it, I should only weary you. There are but few persons to whom I venture to complain, few would understand me, & still fewer would sympathise with me.- 'You are in health, (they would say) in the prime of life, have every thing supplied you without labour (so much the worse) nature, reason, open to you their stores?' All this is partly true-- but, with inexpressible yearnings, my spirit still pants for something more, something higher - the morning rises upon me with sadness & the evening closes with distaste - imperfection, uncertainty, is impressed on every pursuit, & I seek to day what to morrow disgusts me. I entered life flush'd with hope & all my plans have fail'd - had they not fail'd, their completion it may be would have proved an equal disappointment! The few worthy people I know appear to me to be struggling with the same, half suppressed, emotions. - Whence is [happiness] why is intellect & virtue so far from confer'ing happiness - or do we form mistaken ideas respecting the nature of intellect & virtue? I will frankly confess that the general good, did we indeed know how to promote it, would be nothing to me if I were to experience no individual benefit.[5] However we refine, every individual is a world to himself, & happiness, I must again repeat, is the only valuable end of existence, or existence must be vain! I cannot dissemble my sentiments however selfish, however defective in benevolence, they may appear, I am solicitous to preserve, or I should rather say to gain, your esteem, but this, I believe, would not be attained by the sacrifice of truth. I meet many people who arraign your sentiments & call your principles in question, but to me your writings & conversation are particularly impressive. - Not that I am prepared to accord with you on every subject, for though I felt the force of many things you [said] in the discussion, which took place the last time I [had the] pleasure of seeing you, they did not bring conviction [...] I own that I am bewildered when talking of [...] mind & that when from this unknown substance all ideas of impression, succession, motion,

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3 Helvetius, *De l'Esprit*, pp. 146-53.

4 Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) a controversial unitarian with whom Hays was in correspondence after the publication of *Cursory Remarks*.

5 Godwin insisted on the primacy of 'general good' above 'individual happiness' with justice being the determining principle. See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 80-91.

matter &c, are abstracted, there is little that remains either for the fancy or the understanding - yet, I do not conceive that my inability to conceive of such a substance demonstrates its nonentity, & though hardly pressed in the argument on which the negative side is, undoubtedly, the easiest, I still cannot help going back to something uncaused & that something I call God: & after having from effects imagined a cause may be deduced, from that cause I again endeavour to infer effects, & wish to look beyond the disorders that now appear so inexplicable & to hope (I was going to say demand) from this inscrutable Being, in future unconceived periods, the end of which I believe myself capable, & which capacity has hitherto served little other purpose than, like a tormenting ignus fattuus to mislead & betray! The animal rises up to satisfy the cravings of nature & lies down to repose, undisturbed with care or anxiety: has man superior powers only to make him pre eminently wretched? - wretched, it seems to me, in proportion as he rises, & I think I could prove this if, to you, it needed [proof]. But it is implied in what I have already said, nor need I, by repetition, further intrude on your valuable time, employed, I trust, to so many better purposes. When you have leisure you will, I hope, favor me with a line or a call, I am sensible of, & have been gratified by the courtesy with which you have already treated me & have been careful not to presume to far upon it. You are, I doubt not, the disciple of your own system & will not spare to reprove, or correct, where you see occasion. Mary Hays

Letter 7A: EMMA COURTNEY TO MR FRANCIS[1]

To what purpose should I trouble you with a thousand wayward, contradictory, ideas and emotions, that I am, myself, unable to disentangle - which have, perhaps, floated in every mind, that has had leisure for reflection - which are distinguished by no originality, and which I may express (though not feel) without force? I sought to cultivate my understanding, and exercise my reason, that, by adding variety to my resources, I might increase the number of my enjoyments: for ***happiness*** is, surely, the only desirable ***end*** of existence! But when I ask myself, Whether I am yet nearer to the end proposed? - I dare not deceive myself - sincerity obliges me to answer in the negative. I daily perceive the gay and the frivolous, among my sex, amused with every passing trifle; gratified by the insipid *routine* of heartless, mindless, intercourse; fully occupied, alternately, by domestic employment, or the childish vanity of varying external ornaments, and "hanging drapery on a smooth block." I do not affect to despise, and I regularly practise, the necessary avocations of my sex; neither am I superior to their vanities. The habits acquired by early precept and example adhere tenaciously; and are never, perhaps, entirely eradicated. But all these are insufficient to engross, to satisfy, the active, aspiring, mind. Hemmed in on every side by the constitutions of society, and not less so, it may be, by my own prejudices - I perceive, indignantly perceive, the magic circle, without knowing how to dissolve the powerful spell. While men pursue interest, honor, pleasure, as accords with their several dispositions, women, who have too much delicacy, sense, and spirit, to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges, remain insulated beings, and must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great, though often absurd and tragical, drama of life. Hence the eccentricities of conduct, with which women of superior minds have been accused - the struggles, the despairing though generous struggles, of an ardent spirit, denied a scope for its exertions! The strong feelings, and strong energies, which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might - ah! what might they not have aided? forced back, and pent up, ravage and destroy the mind which gave them birth!

Yes, I confess, *I am unhappy*, unhappy in proportion as I believe myself (it may be, erringly) improved. Philosophy, it is said, should regulate the feelings, but it has added fervor to mine! What are passions, but another name for powers? The mind capable of receiving the most forcible impressions is the sublimely improveable mind! Yet, into whatever trains such minds are accidentally directed, they are prone to enthusiasm, while the vulgar stupidly wonder at the effects of powers, to them wholly inconceivable: the weak and the timid, easily discouraged, are induced, by the first failure, to relinquish their pursuits. "They make the impossibility they fear!" But the bold and the persevering, from

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1 *Memoirs*, I, pp. 167-72.

repeated disappointment, derive only new ardor and activity. "They conquer difficulties, by daring to attempt them."

I feel, that I am writing in a desultory manner, that I am unable to crowd my ideas into the compass of a letter, and, that could I do so, I should perhaps only weary you. There are but few persons to whom I would venture to complain, few would understand, and still fewer sympathise with me. You are in health, they would say, in the spring of life, have every thing supplied you without labour (so much the worse) nature, reason, open to you their treasures! All this is, partly, true - but, with inexpressible yearnings, my soul pants for something more, something higher! The morning rises upon me with sadness, and the evening closes with disgust - Imperfection, uncertainty, is impressed on every object, on every pursuit! I am either restless or torpid, I seek to-day, what tomorrow, wearies and offends me.

I entered life, flushed with hope - I have proceeded but a few steps, and the parterre of roses, viewed in distant prospect, nearer seen, proves a brake of thorns. The few worthy persons I have known appear, to me, to be struggling with the same half suppressed emotions. - Whence is all this? Why is intellect and virtue so far from conferring happiness? Why is the active mind a prey to the incessant conflict between truth and error? Shall I look beyond the disorders which, *here*, appear to me so inexplicable? - shall I expect, shall I demand, from the inscrutable Being to whom I owe my existence, in future unconceived periods, the *end* of which I believe myself capable, and which capacity, like a tormenting *ignis fatuus*, has hitherto served only to torture and betray? The animal rises up to satisfy the cravings of nature, and lies down to repose, undisturbed by care - has man superior powers, only to make him pre-eminently wretched? - wretched, it seems to me, in proportion as he rises? Assist me, in disentangling my bewildered ideas - write to me - reprove me - spare me not!

'EMMA.'

Letter 8: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

A few lines! For once then take them as follows. First, for your judgment of authors. Rousseau, Voltaire, Smollet, Fielding! what an insatiable & merciless deity is yours, who requires that I should sacrifice at his shrine all those persons whom I have accustomed to preserve nearest to my heart! If I were to undertake to calculate the benefits which they, or any one of them, have conferred on mankind, my power of calculation would soon sink under the attempt. Honoured & adorable champions of human nature, human virtue & human happiness! who have extended the land marks of science, awakened the best feelings of the heart, humanized the savage nature of your species, given a mortal shock to the edifices of superstition, & abridged the term of all our worst vices, the vices of ignorance, of contracted sentiment & of bigotry! Ye have doubled the consciousness of all that is valuable in existence to every one of your admirers!

But you object, & say, "They have not done all this in the exact form & manner that you would have prescribed": you assure me that "you can spy some spots in the ermine of their honour." Why, so can I. But I will never forget that their merits towards mankind swallow up their errors a thousand times told. Generous & exalted spirits! though your "sins were as scarlet," never, never would I cease to laud & adore you.

Thus far I can almost forget my scepticism & turn dogmatist; I proceed with some assurance. But I recollect my scepticism, when I add: First, that perhaps some of their supposed vices are virtues, & that they did well to free us from the chains of a monastic celibacy: Secondly, that there is probably some error in the vulgar notion respecting these authors, that they greatly excite our looser passions. Something of that sort perhaps for a moment; but it is soon gone; lost in the nobler lessons that they write on our hearts with a pen of iron. No man is seduced, but by the unbridled play of his own imagination, little assisted from this side, or by the immoral & licentious companions he frequents. This at least seems to be pretty universally true of my sex.

The second point of your letter turns, I believe, upon Epicureanism. If by Epicureanism is meant the grand principle that pleasure is the supreme & only good, the only thing worthy to be pursued, I have no objection to it. But, if we restrain our Epicureanism, as you do, to self-pleasure, there I beg leave to demur. Rousseau, Voltaire, Smollet & Fielding, I suspect, never made so pernicious a mistake as this. First, I can never consent coolly in my own mind to count my interest as of greater value than that of the whole universe. I cannot consent to be so egregious a dupe, or so unfeeling & ungenerous a spirit. Secondly, if I could, I suspect that the man who sits down methodically to the expensive pursuit of happiness, never succeeds; while the man who practises self-denial & self-oblivion in his zeal for the good of others, always obtains the

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1 In *Love-Letters*, pp. 229-31.

sublimest consolations, if not, which I think more frequently happens, the most enviable felicity.

Sep 2 1795 W. G.

I believe I ought to have mentioned distinctly that I consider the Yahoo story, alias the Voyage to the Hoynhnms, as one of the most virtuous, liberal & enlightened examples of human genius that has yet been produced.

Letter 9: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

You must not draw me into a correspondence which is wholly incompatible with my avocations & the disposition of my time. I would not answer your letter, were it not that you suggest a doubt of having forfeited some part of my good opinion.

That, I assure you, is not the case. I found, or thought I found, you in an error; but that neither shocked not surprised me. There is scarcely any difference of opinion by which a person can forfeit my good opinion.

You appear to me to have considerably altered your tone respecting my heroes, in the letter now before me. Before, you upon the whole condemned them, at your bar of morality, as depraved persons, & corrupters of mankind.

But you are still far from satisfying me. You talk of the powers of these writers. I talk of the virtue with which their hearts glowed, & the inestimable benefits they conferred on mankind. I talk of men, whose virtue, whose generosity, whose heroic spirit of sacrifice, doubled their own existence, & continues to double that of every one that truly understands them. I talk of Swift & Sterne, the apostles, & of Rousseau & Voltaire, the martyrs, of humanity.

Did you ever read Sheridan's Life of Swift, or the Vie de Voltaire, printed at Geneva, in I2mo, which I recommend in my Political Justice?

I am very far from agreeing with you that virtue is a matter of taste. I place it upon a more solid & immoveable basis. I will never make a eunuch of my mind, or keep myself ignorant in order that I may be good.

You misunderstood my charge respecting Epicureanism. My system of thinking does not allow me to be satisfied with your placing your happiness in the good of others, but requires a disinterested benevolence, that you should desire their good for their sake, & not for your own.

We will now, if you please, return to our old contract: you shall communicate your sentiments by letter, & I will answer you in person.

Sep. 7. 1795 W. Godwin

You seem to have equally misconceived my principles on the subject of friendship. I believe it to be virtuous to distinguish between man & man, & that in precise proportion to the estimable qualities that exist, & the opportunities I have of knowing those qualities. Do you desire anything more? Do you desire to be esteemed for qualities that you have not?

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1 In *Love-Letters*, pp. 231-32.

Letter 10: HAYS TO GODWIN

Oct^{br} 1st - 95 No 30 Kirby Street - Hatton Garden

Your last obliging letter has restored me to freedom & enabled me again to take up my pen & scribble to you without reserve & without apprehension. I suspected that philosophy might have its dogma as well as religion, that there was even a possibility of being bigotted against bigottry, & that in avoiding Sylla we might be wrecked upon Charybdis:[1] but you have convinced me that I may yet venture to oppose your sentiments without hazard of forfeiting your esteem or incurring your displeasure.

My judgement respecting the defects of your favourite authours (for I do not disallow either their virtues or their powers) is not materially altered:[2] but I suspect that, in stating my objections, my meaning might be involved in some obscurity. I think, with Rousseau, that on all subjects, the plainest language is the most delicate & that simplicity is true refinement: this simple majesty I have, with many others, admired in the language of the Jewish & Christian scriptures. I am not fastidiously offended with any of the writers in question for conveying their meaning in obvious terms; neither wou'd a gross idea have been the more acceptable to me from being cloathed in the garb of artificial refinement. Also, on the subject of morals, I have an idea, my opinions wou'd differ but little from your own. Notions of virtues, originating in monastic institutions, appear to me, when contrasted with profligacy to be but vice in its opposite extreme.[3]

I regard chastity as an important branch of temperance, yet I likewise suspect that, on this subject many mistakes have been made, mistakes that have rendered the generality of men dissolute, & have divided women, with but few exceptions, into two classes of victims - Those who are necessitated by the worst kind of prostitution to exchange their persons for a subsistence: (for this traffic is no uncommon basis even of matrimonial arrangements) & those whom superior spirit & taste, or the want of meretricious allurement, condemn to the severe task of stifling every natural affection, & of exposing themselves, unprotected, weakened by education & habit, to insult if not to penury.[4]

After speaking thus freely you will not accuse me of Lady-like affectation, still less, I hope of licentious construction, when I, yet, object to many parts of the writings of Rousseau & Stern, for having a tendency to introduce ideas & excite emotions unfavorable to that equal & healthful temperature of the senses & passions which is necessary to preserve the intellect free & unclouded. The mere ribaldry of Tristram Shandy is, in my opinion, on every account more censurable, for it has not even the merit of simplicity.

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1 Scylla, a sea monster dwelt on a rock opposite the whirlpool Charybdis. Hence the phrase signifies two equal dangers. See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, p. 220.

2 See Letters 7 and 8.

3 See Letter 7.

4 See also *Monthly Magazine* 3 (1797), p. 194, 'Improvements Suggested in Female Education' where Hays argues that 'sexual distinctions respecting chastity, an important branch of temperance, have served but to increase the tide of profligacy, and have been the fruitful source of the greater part of the infelicity and corruption of society'.

Also, notwithstanding all that may be alleged respecting mistakes in morals, the apparent pleasure with which some other celebrated writers have, not only represented, in delineating the human character existing circumstances but, dwelt upon & exaggerated disgusting images, can convey to the Reader no idea of that philosophical elevation of mind which only removes man from the brute. Your exalted system, which is ultimately to subject the sensitive to the intellectual nature of man, is scarcely to be promoted by such means.

Still, permit me to repeat, that in pointing out the great faults of great characters a general censure is by no means implied, neither am I so tasteless, nor so unjust, as not to acknowledge their merits, even though I shou'd not allow full credit to their martyrdom! I never read the works you recommend but I should be happy to have an opportunity of so doing - Will you think me very reprehensible if I tell you that on the subject of martyrdom, whether religious, political, or moral, I am inclined to scepticism? So many motives go to make up an action - "What crops of wit & honesty appear
"From spleen, from obstinacy, hate or fear!"[5]
I do not, as you accuse me, make taste the basis of virtue, but I cannot help thinking that a cultivated taste may frequently preserve us from mean & sordid vices. I am, also, doubtful whether it may be necessary to refine quite so much, as you seem to do, respecting disinterestedness:[6] at least, I can form no other idea of disinterestedness than that from habit we lose sight of the intermediate links of the chain, & love virtue as the miser does his money, originally for what it would procure us, ultimately for its own sake.[7] These are the only ideas that harmonise with my present system of philosophy, convince me that it is ill founded & unconsequental & I will gladly, after the examination, exchange it for yours.

I have said that I was a materialist & I would say so still if I knew what I meant: but, as I am very ignorant of the nature of matter, I will only say, that man appears to me to be but of one substance, capable of receiving from external impressions sensible ideas, successively formed into various combinations & trains, carried on, by means of sympathy & association with mechanical exactness, in an infinite series of causes & effects. Were I to speak as a religionist I should add - That the God of Providence either subjected our minds to mechanical principles, or leads & governs us by the circumstances with which he has surrounded us; that his power implies his goodness; & that, after the struggle of the

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5 Alexander Pope, *An Essay On Man*, 'Epistle Two', 185-86.

6 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 346-48: 'They who maintain that self love is the only spring of action, say in effect, not only that no action is disinterested, but that no disinterested consideration contributes in any degree as an inducement to action. [...] Considering then the system of, disinterestedness as sufficiently established in theory, let us compare it with the lessons of experience'. The second edition states, 'The man of benevolence [...] ascends to the highest of human pleasures, the pleasures of disinterestedness. [...] No man so truly promotes his own interest as he that forgets it' (I, p. 447).

7 Compare the 2nd edition of *Political Justice*, I, p. 426:

> But it is the nature of the passions speedily to convert what at first were means into ends. The avaricious man forgets the utility of money which first incited him to pursue it, fixes his passion upon the money itself, and counts his gold, without having in his mind any idea but that of seeing and handling it. [...] This is merely one case of the phenomena of habit'.

This is not included in the 1st edition, and Godwin may have been influenced by Hays's example.

passions has unfolded our reason, we shall be gradually prepared for greater & still encreasing perfection. - That we ought to regard the vicious in no other light than we do the diseased, & that it is a part of the duty assigned to us to aid the general effort for improvement & restoration.

In speaking as a philosopher my system would not greatly differ. I should only be at a loss to reconcile moral disorder, or to discover & comprehend the first mover.

Since you will not write, converse with me freely when I shall have the pleasure of seeing you:[8] Point out to me the weaknesses & the defects of my principles, prove to me wherein they fail: but after destroying my fabric, if it indeed be void of foundation, allow me to claim your assistance in erecting one more consistent, more solid, more consolatory!

My present residence (in which I purpose remaining during the winter is, I should think, more in your walks, & will I hope procure me the pleasure of more frequent conversations with you.[9]

I certainly ought to be satisfied with your definition of friendship, but on this, as on many other, subjects I am not always reasonable.

Mary Hays

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8 See Letter 9.

9 Hays is writing from 30, Kirby Street, Hatton Garden a mile or so away from Godwin's address of 25, Chalton Street, Somers Town.

Letter 11: HAYS TO GODWIN

Oct^{br} 13th. 1795. No 30. Kirby Street - Hatton Garden

I always see you with pleasure & am sorry when you take your leave. Your conversation excites the curiosity & the activity of my mind: yet, so weak am I, that the unexpected entrance of a friend throws me into (shall I use a female phrase?) a flutter of spirits &, not unfrequently, involves my ideas in a temporary confusion. This, I make no doubt, you must have observed. My mind & constitution, some years since, received a shock, the effects of which I suspect I shall never wholly recover.[1] Naturally (if you will allow of the unphilosophic expression, for I cannot at present recollect one more appropriate?) susceptible of strong impressions, a peculiar train of circumstances called these feelings into exercise, & privacy & retirement fixed the fatal, connected chain. Like a skilful physician, I can retrace the causes, the symptoms, the progress, & thoroughly understand the nature of my mind's disorders, but the remedies are not within my power. My philosophy serves but to convince me of the inveterate nature of reiterated habits; I do not say that they are absolutely invincible; but, I believe, in some cases the leopard may as well change his spots or the ethiopian his skin.[2] Yet, what I can do I have done, & still continue to do. I do not cherish dissatisfaction from thinking that it argues a superior degree of refinement, neither am I constitutionally morose or gloomy: on the contrary, the purity of my temperament has resisted the effects of my mind's depression: for, though sometimes lively, I am seldom cheerful, & yet I at present enjoy, without being very robust, almost uninterrupted health. I set out in life upon very wrong principles; with (what Mrs Macauley terms) the humour of being "wonderfully delighted";[3] I refused to be pleased with any thing that did not call forth strong emotion, (this disposition was foster'd, if not generated, by an early passion for novels & romances) that did not interest either my heart or my understanding. I was an enthusiast in friendship, an enthusiast in love, an enthusiast in my desire of knowledge![4] The result was, that my heart was pierced through with many sorrows, & my understanding, alternately, harrassed with doubt & bewilder'd in error. The spring of life is now past, & it has been "worn in anguish", the

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1 Hays's first hint of her thwarted relationship with John Eccles who died in August 1790, and from which Hays declared she had never recovered.

2 Compare *Letters and Essays*, p. 167: 'When once reiterated associations are thoroughly and deeply impressed on the brain, they are almost as difficult to be eradicated or changed, as the spots of the leopard, or the skin of the Ethiopian; and the notion of mechanism affords a surer basis for the success of our endeavours in what respects moral qualities than any other'.

3 Catherine Macaulay Graham (1731-91). Hays often misquotes and may have been thinking of, 'When the humour of being prodigiously delighted, says a sensible writer [probably Fenelon], takes a strong hold on the imagination, it hinders our providing for, or acquiescing in those soothing engagements, the due variety and succession of which, are the only things that supply a continual stream of happiness'. See *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects*, p.49. Hays included an enthusiastic account of her life in *Female Biography*, 1802.

4 To John Eccles Hays declares herself:

> a perfect enthusiast in my approbation of the country, as indeed I am of everything; there is no exertion of the human mind, no effort of the understanding, imagination, or heart, without a spark of this divine fire. Without enthusiasm, genius, virtue, pleasure, even love itself languishes; all that refines, adorns, softens, exalts, ennobles life, has its source in this principle. (*Love-Letters*, p. 49)

summer is passing & will quickly fade, age is approaching to blunt my powers & destroy my faculties, & the dreary prospect will, perhaps, close in the tomb. I love action, but I have little to employ myself in; I love society, but my sex & acquired delicacy, & still more the narrowness of my fortune, deprives me of this resource. I would travel, I would change the scene, I would put myself in the way of receiving new impressions, I would sluice of my thoughts into various channels, I would place myself in new situations, I would propose to myself new labours, & engage with ardor in new pursuits - All this I should prescribe to another in my circumstances, but all this is, to me, unattainable. Ah! how impotent is mere reasoning against reiterated feeling! the examination of my own mind would, alone, have been sufficient to convince me of its mechanism. Will you admit of this free communication of sentiment? There are not many persons to whom I dare venture to disclose my heart, few would understand me, & still fewer would sympathise with me.[5] You have on many subjects listened to me with indulgence, & this has inspired me with confidence, has encouraged me to speak freely. It is because you are a philosopher that I can unfold my mind without reserve or apprehension: you are able to trace, & to investigate, the sources of its disorders & its mistakes. I have found it necessary, however irksome to the ingennuousness of my temper, to practise more reserve with those by whom, from our having but few ideas in common, my meaning might be wrested, & my sentiments liable to be misconstrued. The step which I have, at present taken has exposed me to some animadversion & censure; I feel a degree of solicitude that my motives should not be disapproved by you, because I respect your judgement, rely on your sincerity, & am desirous of your esteem, I believe I hinted to you that, having been disappointed in all my plans, having too much sensibility & too little fortitude to support the disappointment with equanimity, I was unwilling to sadden the declining age of a beloved parent,[6] & the opening prospects of a younger sister,[7] by an habitual melancholy which I was unable to controul, & to which the privacy & uniformity of our situation afforded but little relief. Beside which, my mother felt some uneasiness from, what she conceived to be, a dangerous freedom in my opinions: It was impossible for a temper like mine to conceal those opinions in the familiar intercourse of domestic life:- She dreaded the effects of them upon the minds of the younger branches of the family; she listened to the conversation of my friends with apprehension; & complained that I had unsettled her mind, & distressed it by painful & harassing suggestions. Sixty years' associations are scarcely to be disunited & if shaken, perhaps, would produce no beneficial effects. Added to which, my days passed on too invariably the same, my mind often stagnated, I wanted

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5 Godwin was a strange choice of confidant, antagonistic as he was to most of what Hays cherished and with his dislike of contradiction.

6 'my mother' crossed through, perhaps as an acknowledgement of Godwin's rejection of the 'magic' in the pronoun 'my'. See *Political Justice*, I, p. 83: 'What magic is there in the pronoun "my," to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth? My wife or my mother may be a fool or a prostitute, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?'.

7 Elizabeth.

outward stimulus to rouse it, I felt myself in a situation that absolutely seemed to require change (such are our imperfections) even though it should be for the worse. So circumstanced, I seized (I confess for a sort of ostensible pretence) the opportunity of my family's meditating a further remove from the metropolis,[8] to make trial of a scheme that had frequently occurred to me. And thus have I (as the world would say & as some of my friends say) very foolishly thrown myself out of the asylum of my youth, & exchanged a life of what is called easy indolence, that is, one of worldly cares, for one more exposed & less assured.[9] It has been asked me, & I have put the question to myself, what benefits I propose to reap from this eccentric step? Shall I reply, a kind of, I know not what, satisfaction in the idea of being free, a wish to break by the necessity of greater exertions, (I acknowledge the weakness which this implies) & even by local change, certain fatal, connected, trains of thinking, a desire of strengthening my mind by standing alone, & of relieving the relations I love of the burthen of my wayward fancies, also, I will own, a latent hope of enjoying, occasionally, more of the intercourse & conversation that pleases me.

Tell me, frankly, do these reasons appear to you satisfactory, for the step is by no means too decided for retraction, or do you likewise think I have judged wrong? I have been, in some measure, fortunate in the situation I have chosen, my apartments, consisting of a parlour, chamber & little dressing room, are commodious, & the terms reasonable.[10] The mistress of the house is a decent, well-behav'd woman, of some education; she carries on the profession of her late father, who was an engraver of exchequer bills, bank drafts &c; her time therefore, like mine is fully occupied. She has never before let out any part of her house, of course, has not acquired the mercenary manners too common, I believe, on such occasions. I dine with her, which makes a break in the day, all the little attendance I want her servant affords me, beside which, at the intervals of business, a clever lad about 12 years old has orders to go of any message or errand for which I may have occasion.

Is not this detail of particulars presuming on your friendship? I confess I feel a pleasure in this presumption, tho'; after what you have written on the subject, some vanity is implied in saying so. The circumstances that I have been enumerating, however unimportant in the eye of philosophy, have to me, who have been sheltered too much like a hot-house plant, some value; I should have added another, which may perhaps provoke a smile, that my landlady is as nice, as regular, & as methodical, as myself, & that her behaviour is observant, attentive, & obliging.

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8 Her mother and sister move to Surrey Road, Peckham.

9 Her new lodgings (from which she has already written her previous letter) are 30, Kirby Street, Hatton Garden.

10 See Letter 26, when Godwin finds Hays dressing by the fire side.

And now I am going to take with you a still greater freedom. I have said that employment is necessary both for my spirits & to make some little addition to my income. Dr Gregory has been kind to me on this subject, but there are too many intervals in my present occupation, & too many uncertainties in my future expectations, to satisfy my mind.[11] Many persons, with the best intentions, afford hopes which they really mean to fulfil, but the performance is dilatory, it keep's not pace with the ardor & rapidity of the expectant's disposition. In the little intercourse I have, thought I have, had with you I have observed a promptness & punctuality which particularly accords with my principles & temper. Should it lay in your way, to assist & occupy this restless spirit of mine, I trust you will not refuse your aid! There are two sorts of writers, I am told, one who live to write, the other, who write to live; the former I cannot afford to do, the latter I should despair of doing; something, I wish for, between them both, that would amuse &, at the same time render my situation easier. I have been applying closely to my french to qualify myself for translating, &, for the present, I could wish to engage in some work of this kind.[12] I am very ignorant of literature, as a business, & would most willingly put myself under your direction; my wishes are modest, & my expectations moderate; but the constant exercise of my faculties is necessary to preserve me from sinking into that painful lassitude, that want of the radical principle of happiness (the having something to do, to hope & to fear) which is of all states the most intolerable. I would rather, as the late Dr J express'd it, be worn to death with scouring than eaten up with rust.[13] Something of all this I had meditated to say to you when I saw you, but I had not sufficient courage. I must not ask for a line in reply, but I will hope for an early & a longer visit! Whenever you are inclined to relax, & will favor me with a call, be assured you are confer'ing pleasure &, I trust, improvement, for, indeed, if I am really 'obstinate' I know not myself! Yet, on all occasions, speak to me with perfect freedom, I shall never think you 'rude' because I am convinced you will never design to be so.

I flatter myself that on many, tho' not on all, subjects, my sentiments have a general conformity to yours: & this I conceive to be paying myself no little compliment. The topic we have lately touched upon, that of morals, is a very interesting one to me, & one respecting which I have long entertained many suspicions. But I will no longer, at present, intrude upon your time.

Mary Hays

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11 George Gregory editor of the *Critical Review*.

12 Hays begins writing for the *Critical Review* 1795 and, according to Wedd 'obtained some further little literary avocations to fill up her time and augment her income' (*Love-Letters*, p. 8). She was corresponding in the *Monthly Magazine* 1796-1800, and reviewing for the *Analytical Review* between 1797 and its demise in 1798. According to Henry Crabb Robinson she had 'early devoted herself to a life of letters; had a small fortune which produced her about 70 per annum. She made up the deficiency by writing' (Morley, p. 4).

13 Hays may have been thinking of Falstaff's 'I were better to be eaten to death with a rust than to be scoured to nothing with perpetual motion'. See William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, 1.2.219-21. Compare Letter 26, note 8.

Letter 12: HAYS TO GODWIN No 30 - Kirby Street. Hatton Garden. Nov 5. 95

I have been much indisposed since I saw you, & being but little accustomed to bodily pain, bear it with a very ill grace. Nature (or circumstances) has given to me an exquisitely susceptible texture of nerves; both in mind & body I am alive to every passing event; the very air sometimes wounds me, & I find hostility in the looks of all I meet. I have often repeated with the poet -

"There's not a breeze impels the passive air
" But brews a tempest in a breast like mine!

These dispositions are too apt to generate selfishness, by absorbing us in our own feelings: I consider you as my mentor, teach me how to rectify them. Another cause has likewise contributed to occasion a longer interval of silence than my inclination would have dictated, for I like to write to you, tho' I have nothing to say, in the hope that my letter may procure me a visit. An accident happened to the fore-finger of my right h&, which, for some time, disabled me from holding a pen, or, at least, from writing intelligibly, that is now heal'd, but my health is not yet, perfectly, re-established.

I was thinking, while dressing, after you left me the last time you call'd, how many faults you had discovered in me, & led me to discover in myself, in the course of our short acquaintance. I am almost affraid to ennumerate them - Bigottry, obstinacy, selfishness, ambition, indolence, sophistry, presumption, vanity, & inconsistency. I fear lest you should be discouraged from the arduous task of attempting my reformation, for I begin, myself, to suspect that I have more tenacity of temper than I was aware of. But you will, at least, allow my claims to some share of modesty & ingennuousness when I declare, that so far from being offended by this representation of myself, which you have given me, it has only tended to render me still more desirous of further intercourse with you, & more solicitous of gaining your esteem, the hope of which, notwithstanding the frightful mirror you have held up to me, I do not yet relinquish. I like your sincerity, &, to afford you a still greater proof of my own, I will give you a little farther insight into my character, though it will make yet more against me: but we cannot expect to have our disorders heal'd by the Physician, however skilful he may be, while we conceal any of their symptoms. Even my ingenuousness, then I doubt, has in it a mixture of policy, & my humility is strongly tinctured with pride. I had, early in life, frequently observed, that the solicitude with which people endeavour'd to conceal their failings from others, served but to sharpen enquiry & aggravate censure, as there is a sort of activity in the human mind that incites it to search the more eagerly after that which is the most studiously conceal'd. I therefore resolved to spare myself this fruitless labour, & to make a kind of composition with, my vices, I fear you wou'd call them, but I thought they were entitled to a gentler appellation. I was always enamoured with the beauties of truth (tho' I am by no means sure that I never swerved from its dictates) & I conceived frankness to be an essential branch of this virtue: I therefore spoke freely of myself & my foibles, conceiving that by the confession I disarm'd the

severer sagacity of others, & made the expiation. And when, in an hour of closer examination, I have turned my eye inward, I have concluded that in the mixt nature of man, many frailties were engrafted on the stock of virtues, & that by harshly erradicating the one, we might destroy the ferment that gave existence to the other. I had been told that the earth was most fertile in the vicinity of a volcano, that in hot climates which produced spices, poisonous plants were also nurtured & ripened, likewise, that the rich soil was, from its luxuriance, most productive of weeds. To compare & find resemblances amuses my imagination, I am fond of analogical reasoning, & I applied these observations to mind. Neither am I yet convinced that they are absolutely void of foundation, but I should have no objection to the admitting of such a conviction which would strengthen my wavering faith respecting the perfectibility of human nature.

And now for my pride, I love praise, love it with an insatiable ardor, but I have lately grown somewhat more fastidious on the subject. Tis true, you have detected in me many faults, of some of which I was myself unconscious, but you have also mixed with your censure some commendation, the truth of which neither your principles, nor your reproofs, will allow me to doubt; & the pleasure which this has given me has been enhanced by my opinion of your sagacity & judgement. That you think me capable of entering into your ideas, & worth reclaiming, is in itself sufficiently flattering, & this, added to the gentle manner in which you have reprehended my mistakes, has preserved me from being wounded by those reprehensions, though I hope it will not render them the less effectual.

But a new difficulty here, occurs to me, I have always disliked the systems both of religion & philosophy that gave a degrading representation of human nature. As a religionist, I have conceived that the calumny glanced at the being who formed that nature, & that, in fact, this favorite topic of the church, with all its scholastic distinctions, was little better than pious blasphemy. As a philosopher, I conceived the human mind to be endowed with exquisite powers both mental & moral, & as having admirable capabilities of improvement. Now, if this be true, & man, instead of being a vile, is a glorious being I feel inclined to suspect, when I compare myself with others, that the portrait you have sketched for me is overcharged. For, freely as I have avowed my faults, I must also, comparitively, lay claim to some virtues, virtues which, now appear to me, scarcely compatible with the dark shadings you have given. If then, I must conclude myself to be a creature thus made up of imperfections, what must I think of the rest of the world, the majority of which it wou'd be difficult to persuade me were better. I have a strong repugnance, as I before observed, to these debasing systems, nor do I think them reconcilable with yours. I must read your work again, in the second editition, for I find one rapid perusal of it was very insufficient to enable me to enter into its principles, hence, perhaps, the cause why I perplex you & bewilder myself![1]

1 The second edition appeared at the end of 1795, despite its publication date of 1796. See Philp, pp. 7-8.

I have been thinking over the plan which you hinted to me, when I last saw you, & it is probable that I may attempt putting it into execution. Shou'd I do so, would you allow me to transmit the sheets to you from time to time, that I might avail myself of your observations as I went on?[2] If this request is unreasonable you have only to say so!

May I hope, ere long, you will drink tea, or spend an hour or two some evening, with me? Your conversation, beside the hope of improvement, is to me an intellectual entertainment. I find so much finesse, so much bigottry, so many prejudices, & so much trifling, in society, so much, in short, of everything that is artificial, that I enjoy a calm, cool, philosophic investigation. I will say, with Madame Roland, I have no objection to Atheists, for at least they are reasoners.[3] I must defer my call upon you till I recover a firmer tone of health. An ingenious young man of my acquaintance solicits to accompany me, but then, it seems, we must take a sunday morng.

Since you will not reply to my letters, in writing, I think you shou'd bring them with you, for I sometimes forget their contents, &, after you have left me, always recollect something unsaid on which I wished to hear your opinion.[4]

Mary Hays

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2 This is the first hint of the future writing of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*.

3 Jeanne-Marie Philipon Roland, 1754-92, leading Girondin and influential opponent of Danton. Hays is probably paraphrasing from Madame Roland's *Memoirs* which had been translated into English in 1795: 'The Atheist is not, in my eyes, a man of ill faith: I can live with him as well, may, better than with the devotee, for he reasons more'. See *The Private Memoirs of Madame Roland* ed. by Edward Gilpin Johnson (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 165.

4 See Letter 9.

Letter 13: HAYS TO GODWIN

No 30 - Kirby Street Hatton Garden

I think, yes! I do think, that you refine too much, & that many centuries must elapse ere some of your opinions will afford a proper foundation for practice. What ever capacities may exist, or may possibly be generated, in the human mind, it is certainly at present very imperfect, we must therefore be content to take the bad with the good, &, in chusing our situation be only careful to observe on which side the balance inclines! So far, perhaps, you will agree with me, & will suspect that I have in my head the subject of our last discussion.

You were not contending, I imagine, for the spirit of monastic institutions, neither I suppose would you deny, that the being who is constituted of sense & intellect may feel the voice of nature too strong, to be silenced by artificial precepts. - When we shall have arrived at that state of perfection as to be all mind, or to stand in no need of law or restraint, your principles will not admit of dispute: but, till then, every violation of the institutions of the country in which we reside (I, at present, wave the moral consideration of the subject) must expose us to great & various civil inconvenienceis, of which I have observed shocking & inhuman instances. This is an argument which we certainly cannot feel with an equal degree of force, because society has, in these respects, made most unjust, tyrannical, & barbarous, sexual distinctions: Distinctions which, if they were not tragical in their consequences, wou'd be contemptible & ridiculous.[1] So as, I can sympathise with the distresses of a Calista, & had more of mind dignified her yeilding to sense, my sympathy would have been more unmixed: but Lothario was a barbarous coxcomb & an attrocious villain, at least, this was the impression which the perusal of the tragedy made upon me: added to which, I was disgusted by the imposition (we must here take into our account the prejudices of society) on the harmless, unsuspecting, Altramont.[2] I conceive that there is much of morals involved in this question, though I do not now advert to them. But what humane & benevolent man, uninfluenced by selfish considerations, would wish to subject the woman whom he thought deserving of the highest species of friendship (for this ought marriage to be) to the world's scorn? Supposing that she might have sufficient magnanimity (though the circumstances which attend female education render this improbable) to trample on that scorn - still, she must suffer, & sharp wou'd be the conflict, the arduous struggle: beside which, she is not only shunn'd, as if infected by some contagious disorder, by, even, some of the best & worthiest part of society (such has been the controul of prejudice) but, if she possess not an independent fortune, she loses, with the worlds respect, in most cases, the very means of procuring a subsistence, & is thrown either into habitual profligacy, or into a servile

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1 Compare *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 193-95.

2 Characters in Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, 1703. The 'gay Lothario' is Calista's lover although she is to marry Altramont. Sorrow and ultimate reconciliation end the play with Calista becoming the fair penitent.

dependence on him for whom she has made these expensive sacrifices.[3] I think you must allow, at least, the general resemblance of my picture! These reflections recurred to me with additional force from a conversation that recently took place in a company when I was present. The connexion of Mrs Woolstonecraft with Mr Imlay (which, it is said, has not received a legal sanction) was the subject of discussion.[4] Some ladies present, most amiable, sensible, & worthy, women, expressed their concern on a variety of accounts, & especially lamented that it would no longer be proper for them to visit Mrs W. I started at what I conceived to be bigotry, frankly declaring that it would have no effect upon my conduct, that I had visited her since, & shou'd receive much pleasure in having an opportunity of doing so again. - That, whatever might be the principles that occasioned or the consequences which might ensue from, the step she had taken, it was her self, only, who must be accountable for, or must suffer them, & that I did not conceive a matter so purely personal to be my concern. Every one was liable to be led into mistakes by the illusions of the imagination, or the erring conclusions of the judgement, that we must not expect to find perfection, & while the balance of excellence preponderated we shou'd regulate our esteem in due proportion - that, at present, I only saw in Mrs W—s conduct a breach of civil institution which, no doubt, would bring with it, notwithstanding her superior fortitude & resources, civil inconveniences. My friends mildly observed, that however just might be my reasoning in the abstract, certain situations & circumstances, required certain observances, which I was, only, not aware of from having mix'd but little with society. The truth is, from having been so much the child of seclusion, I am very ignorant of the forms enjoined by the varnish of half civilization, the proof of corruption, & the miserable substitute for virtue, called punctillio, & have always felt inclined to repeat with Shakeapeare's Hamlet - Seems, I know not seems! &c.[5] I have since been told that the reflection has been suggested (not by any of the party alluded to) 'that as Miss Hays is so professed an admirer of Mrs W, it is to be hoped that she does not mean to imitate her conduct?' Here, was an exemplification of my friend's observations -. If we cannot, then, render society just, surely, wilful martyrdom, when no apparent benefit is to be derived from it, is not a duty, especially, when by bringing too hastily forward advanced principles & acting upon them, the acceleration might probably do mischief. I know not whether, in some cases, there may not be bigotry in abstaining too scrupulously from received customs, even Socrates sacrifice a cock to Esculapis,[6] also, while we continue to live in every country we are obliged generally to conform to its political institutions; understood as the sovereign will of the majority, wou'd it not be captious to except only in one point, & that, possibly not the most important? Every thing has its

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3 Compare *Monthly Magazine* 3 (1797), pp. 193-95.

4 For an account of Elizabeth Inchbald and Mrs Siddons' reaction, see Tomalin, p. 268.

5 Hamlet, 1.2.76. See also *Love-Letters*, letters 21 August 1779 (p. 56), 5 October 1779 (p. 119), and 1 May 1780 (p. 193), where Hays expresses her early concern with the 'rules of delicacy' and a distrust of punctilio.

6 Aesculapius, son of Apollo and Coronis.

proper season in which it may be brought forward with most advantage; in the present crude state of things your theory reduced to practise wou'd, I suspect, encrease the tide of corruption; at least I think the experiment would be very dangerous. I am even of opinion that your writings have done less good than they might have done, by rousing at once prejudices too various & too powerful; I know many persons who would as soon venture to look upon the Gorgons head as trust themselves in company with Mr Godwin. - A professed atheist, say they, a contemner of all law &c, has no motives to be virtuous, & they draw a frightful picture & persuade themselves that you sat for it. It is in vain that I have contended, with all the ardor that has ever mix'd itself with my feelings, against these cruel & absurd prejudices, that I have endeavour'd to demonstrate that the energies which are thrown into speculation abstract the mind, in proportion, from the objects of sense, that the consequences which they deduce from your principles are such as you wou'd, yourself, disallow, & are the chimeras of their own creation, that they must have been convinced of this had they suffer'd themselves to examine the principles they thus arraign.- It is in vain that I have, alternately, reasoned & remonstrated - for-

"Convince a man against his will
"And he's of the same opinion still.

May we not, then I again ask, by endeavouring to do too much, in a given period, defeat our own purposes & effect the less.

But to return to the subject from which I have been digressing (which is merely interesting to me as a speculation, for my plans of this nature - plans, which I confess I have meditated with ineffable delight, are all blasted!) The inconveniences, which you enumerated as necessarily attached to the marriage state, apply, in a degree, to friendship, nay to every species of social intercourse.[7] While human beings continue imperfect & liable to error they must make a compact of mutual forebearance; this belongs to humanity, & takes place, more or less, in proportion to the progress & improvement of each individual. The affections & sentiments which arise out of the sympathies of our nature (or, if you prefer the phrase, are generated by our habits) are not the less real, though the supposed excellence on which they are founded shou'd be merely the work of an erroneous fancy: the mind capable of sketching the picture is brought forward by the

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7 See *Political Justice*, II, pp. 848-52, where Godwin discusses the 'evils of cohabitation and marriage'. His subsequent marriage was an embarrassment to him which he defends in a letter to his friend Wedgwood, 'Some persons have found an inconsistency between my practice in this instance and my doctrines. But I cannot see it. The doctrine of my *Political Justice* is, that an attachment in some degree permanent, between two persons of opposite sex, is right, but that marriage, as practised in European countries, is wrong. I still adhere to that opinion. Nothing but a regard for the happiness of the individual, which I had no right to injure, could have induced me to submit to an institution which I wish to see abolished, and which I recommend to my fellow-men, never to practise, but with the greatest caution. Having done what I thought necessary for the peace and respectability of the individual, I hold myself no otherwise bound than I was before the ceremony took place' Quoted in Brown, *The Life of William Godwin*, pp. 119-20. Godwin's fear is formulated because 'all attachments to individuals, except in proportion to their merits, are plainly unjust. [...] Cohabitation is not only an evil as it checks the independent progress of mind; it is also inconsistent with the imperfections and propensities of man. It is absurd to expect that the inclinations and wishes of two human beings should coincide through any long period of time. [...] The institution of marriage is a system of fraud [...]' (II, pp. 848-49).

effort, & sacrifices (as Rousseau observes) every sordid feeling to the imaginary model.[8] Whatever exalts the passions & raises the imagination gives birth to talents, to great & heroic exertions - would it be desirable to sacrifice all the picturesque & delightful visions which float in the fancy, however illusive?[9] Who wou'd wish for a microscopic eye which should discover, on the apparently polished surface, frightful & gaping chasms? who wou'd wish for the senses of a Gulliver among the Brobdinagians?[10] I confess, for myself, it is necessary to my existence, to be esteemed, beloved, & cherished, yes! I even suspect, for qualities that I have not! The source of all my pleasures & of all my improvements has been in my attachments - I love to find excellence, to admire, & to emulate, it - when I lose this ardour I shall sink into apathy & lassitude! Hence, I have ever resisted degrading systems, I have no unfavourable opinion of the world, why should I? In the small circle of my acquaintance I have experienced, an hundred-fold, the proportion of kindness & goodness, & tho' in the lapse of time I may discover, & have sometimes discovered, that I have appreciated objects too favourably, the benefits which I have derived still remain. All enthusiastic feelings go beyond the truth, but without a spark of this living fire, genius, virtue, affection, languishes! - I perceive I am in danger of rising into raphsody, I therefore, in time, descend.

Your observation respecting constant, domestic, intercourse, tho' somewhat exaggerated, has some general truth in it, yet, a mind regulated by reason ought to have no ill humours to vent, but I see no particular objection against separate cells provided the parties are independent of each other, can dispense with certain fashionable arrangements, & agree in thinking it the most eligible.[11] You, as a philosopher, it may be, lay less stress on domestic establishments, [order], & management, than most other men: to say truth, the expensive style of living, which, in the present age, is conceived necessary on these occasions, has militated powerfully against the freedom, the virtue, & the happiness of mankind.

I dont know whether sudden transitions are allowable in epistolary writing, be that as it may, I find them often very convenient. I thank you for reassuring me respecting the estimation you have form'd of my character, I now begin to reckon, with more certainty, upon your esteem, my vanity often leads me to be diffident of myself in the same degree that I am avaricious of the respect of others. Some calumniators of Mr Godwin say 'that

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8 Also quoted in *Letters and Essays*, pp. 8-9, 'Do you recollect what Rouseau says of love? It is not very inapplicable to the subject we are upon. "If it be an illusion, there is some reality in the sentiments it inspires in favour of the true beautiful, and we sacrifice every sordid idea to the imaginary model." Most of the happiness of life perhaps consists in agreeable illusions, at least the tree must blossom, before it will bear fruit'.

9 See *De l'Esprit*, pp. 149-153. See also chapter three of this study.

10 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726, Part 2.

11 Godwin and Wollstonecraft follow this arrangement after their own marriage. They share a house at 29, The Polygon and Godwin rents rooms nearby. See Tomalin, p. 266.

he flatters women',[12] but I will not think that a philosophic reformer can expect to improve one half of the human race, by wilfully assisting in the degradation of the other.

Accept, also, my acknowlegements for the encouragement you have given me to prosecute my projected work! I had made a beginning, but having engaged, at present in a more certainly productive literary undertaking, must reserve it for a season of more uninterrupted leisure.[13] The epistolary form I conceived the most adapted to my style & habits of composition, but I cou'd not please myself - fictitious correspondance affords me not the stimulus which I ever feel when addressing my friends. Shou'd I proceed I cou'd wish to produce a work that shou'd do me some credit, that should be written under your auspices, & that you should conceive not unworthy of being publickly addressed to you.

I ought not to ask to see you frequently for, beside its being unreasonable, my intellects will be soon exhausted, but while yours appear to me to be inexhaustible I cannot help making the requisition, I can scarcely say you have greatly benefitted me, my present way of life, also, accords more with my disposition, I am more employ'd, more amused, & more chearful. I was glad you mentioned Mr Draper, because it gave me an opportunity of obliging you,[14] I have much, in my disposition (excuse me) of the vice of gratitude. I wrote immediately to Mr D, who will meet you with pleasure in the vacation, at present every moment of his time is occupied. Mr D has raised himself in society, has a strong & a clear head, much scientific knowledge, & many good qualities, but he wants delicacy of taste & feeling. - you smile! - There are, likewise, some very glaring inconsistencies in his conduct: he is, besides, the most unqualified admirer of himself, & as little apt to allow merit in others, as any person I know, not that he is of a [ ] or splenetic temper, far from it, but his sense of admiration is absorbed in the contemplation of his own acquirements, owing in some measure, perhaps, to his having risen very superior to those who were originally his equals & having had but few opportunities of comparing himself with his superiors. I have know him long, but I have not discover'd in him those social qualities of the heart (notwithstanding all he says of having been in love) which please me. He had communicated knowledge to me, which I consider as the first & highest of all gifts, & I was disposed to feel grateful, but not a single advance has he ever made in friendly cordiality, & his manners were as frigid the fiftieth time of meeting as the first: he boasts of stoicism, his sinews are of brass & his nerves of iron: the only time I ever heard him speak of being at all moved, was in accidentally hearing the miserable

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12 According to Don Locke, success had made Godwin 'more extrovert, more self-confident, than at any other time. He abandoned his sombre parson's clothes for a blue coat and stockings, a yellow waistcoat and breeches, and for once in his life he was not lost for conversation. Fame, they say, is an aphrodisiac, and there gathered around him a cluster of fashionable left-wing ladies, each flattered by the attentions of so illustrious a figure' (p. 108).

13 Hays was writing for the *Critical Review* in 1795.

14 Hugh Worthington writes of Draper, 'whose sermon discovers very considerable talents, and whose situation arrests one's sympathy'. See Letter to Mary Hays, 17 January 1794. Dr Williams's Library.

groans & cries of a soldier suffering under execrable martial discipline, &, even, this he minutely described - a description that harrowed up my soul - with an unaltered voice & gesture.

I am almost ashamed of the length of my letter, but I will not add to it by apologies - Remember, you are to bring Mr Holcroft to visit me, let it be to drink tea, & favor me with a line of information that I may preserve myself disengaged,[15] tho' I wou'd not wish you to suppose that because you found me in company when you last favor'd me with a call that I am generally engaged in an afternoon, for, I do assure you, this is by no means the case. I shall always be glad to see you, at any time that best suits you, but, I confess, I feel most disposed for conversation towards evening. My eyes & h& are quite wearied, I fear my writing will be scarcely legible, it is time I relieved both you & myself - Farewell!

Mary Hays

Friday evening 11 o'clock Nov 20th - 1795.

15 See Letter 14.

Letter 14: GODWIN TO HAYS

Mr Godwin & Mr Holcroft will do themselves the pleasure of drinking tea with Miss Hayes on Friday, if convenient. If no answer be returned to this note, it will be considered as an affirmation.

Tuesday, Nov 24

No 30 - Kirby St - Hatton Garden - Dec^{br} 1795

Letter 15: HAYS TO GODWIN

My philosophy will, I doubt, become sadly deranged if I must banish the terms & the ideas of cause & effect: my whole system of necessity, which I conceived to be founded upon a rock, begins to totter. If there be no necessary connection between circumstance & impression where is the basis for the efforts of your magician? his disciple may start in a moment from him, like a lawless planet, & baffle his most strenuous exertions.

I seem afloat, without rudder or ballast, in the wide sea of scepticism, & begin to fear that my little bark has escaped the hidden shoals of the narrow straits, only to founder in the unfathomable ocean.

I must write to you, though my ideas are, at present, involved in no little confusion, but, while my letters appear to be the antecedent to which your visits are the consequent, I can never want a motive to take up my pen.[1] - I have been referring to my Euclid for this same antecedent & consequent, but it has not afforded me much illustration: before I proceed, I think I had better attempt a definition of the terms, or, rather, to state the ideas they convey to me. Had I seen you for an indefinite number of times, follow'd by Mr Holcroft, I might have call'd you the antecedent & your friend the consequent, but, at the same time, this notion wou'd have been very different from what (by way of distinction) we call a physical cause & effect. (I shall get bewildered, you admit of no system of physics, I believe, you will make me, ere long, like the ancient pyrrhon'ics, doubt of the reality of my own existence, of matter & motion[2] - I do not perceive the utility of refining so much.) I confess (I may be wrong) that there is a something which appears to me distinguishable from this accidental, or moral, antecedent & consequent - If I, with design, stretch out my h& a thousand times a day, & repeat the experiment every day of my life, to grasp an unresisting object - this design, this invariable motion, & invariable consequence, seems to bespeak a real & necessary connexion, subject to fix'd laws, & which, however ignorant I may be of the nature of those laws or the generating substance, I think may, without impropriety be denominated cause & effect & afford [ ] certain criterion for our enquiries, & experiments, & conclusions, without this, the truth in natural philosophy, even the deductions from lines & figures wou'd be vague or utterly fail. Moral causes & effects are, I shou'd also suspect, to the full as certain, & the distinctions we make between them merely the consequence of our ignorance, the time may arrive when they will admit of similar demonstration, but till that time, for the sake of perspicuity, we are obliged to vary our terms. I fear I do not express myself with sufficient precision, but when I am told, that the three internal angles of a triangle are

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1 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 283-304 (292-3) where Godwin discusses antecedent and consequent in relation to free will and necessity.

2 Pyrrho of Elis (c.365 - 275 BC) believed that all phenomena was 'indistinguishable, imponderable and indeterminable', and that this realization enabled one to attain an imperturbable peace of mind'. See *A Dictionary of Philosophy* ed. by Antony Flew (London: Pan Books, 1979), p. 294.

equal to two right angles, I yeild to the proposition without hesitation, because I have examined the premises & can trace them to their original, simple, principles - but was a person to say to me, in the course of the next six months a pure republic will be establish'd in this country, erected upon the overthrow of the present constitution, I shou'd suspend my assent, not that it may not be altogether as certain, but because I am not equally capable of tracing the complicated movements on which it depends - so that after all, cause & effect, antecedent & consequent, mean exactly the same thing, & we distinguish between them (as I before observed) only from our own ignorance: yet, perhaps to make ourselves intelligible, till the world gets more enlighten'd, we must continue, in popular language, this distinction. Conceiving thus (however absurdly I may have express'd myself) of our designs & their effects or consequences, I cannot get rid of the notion, which appears to me the result of fair analogical reasoning, that the order of the universe bespeaks similar design - I am even inclined to adopt the ardent language of Rousseau, & say 'Being of beings, I am because thou art'.[3] And tho' I will relinquish to you every idea I have hitherto formed of such a designer, the sentiment, whether from habit, association, or conviction, obstinately adheres.

I must suspect you gentlemen of some assumption, when you decidedly class on the side of your opinions the balance of intellect, such a calculation is, I conceive, difficult to make, nor do I think the progress of reason so very rapid, as to be certain, that modern discoverers (& yet I rate them very high) have already superceded the enquiries & labours of a Newton, Locke, Hartley, with a long etcetera of respectable names - The Universe, I think your friend asserted,[4] bespoke not the first & wisest of all possible designs, in reply to this, may I not ask - how little of nature do we yet know? future investigators may, it is not improbable, discover admirable adaptation in what now appears, to us, distorted & deformed. I will not apologize for what I have written, however trite or confused; it may have been my lot, as heretofore, to have misconceived you; I am less modest than my sister, & will never decline a subject through the mere apprehension of incompetence; how are our faculties to be improved if we do not exercise them? it is by first hazarding wrong judgements, that we, at length, acquire the capacity of forming right ones.

You may, if you please, read to your friend what I have written, & tell him, I shall be glad to converse with him, in future on this, or on any other subject but, tho' I like his frankness & energy, he must not make use of exclamations, nor speak in tones quite so high, or he will frighten the arguments out of my head.[5] Instruction shou'd fall softly, like a gentle, insinuating, shower of dews: the free mind revolts at the slightest coercive symptoms, on such occasions one is apt pertinaciously to reply - 'Am not I, also, a

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3 Compare *Emile*, ed. by Foxley, pp. 228-78, 'The Creed of a Savoyard Vicar'.

4 Holcroft.

5 Hays held Holcroft in awe. See Letters 14 and 15.

painter?'[6] I thank you, very sincerely, for your introduction to Mr Holcroft, & shall feel myself mortified if our conversation afforded him no degree of incitement to repeat his visit. - I love mental stimulus, & I seek a commerce with those who are capable of affording it: The want of impression is, to me, the most intolerable of all wants. I did not recollect till after you left us, that Mr H had studied & translated Lavater,[7] this accounts to me for his physiognomonical observations, now, wou'd I give something for his judgement on the groupe assembled, tho', perhaps the knowledge wou'd sufficiently punish me for the vain curiosity! This is, also, a subject on which my mind is by no means made up - I only know that the handsomest people of my acquaintance are neither the best nor the wisest, & I am inclined to believe that all our ideas respecting personal beauty are generated, arbitary, & uncertain - I confess, I never see beauty in the countenance that is not irradiated with intelligence or impressed by feeling,

I shall not be unmindful of your reproof respecting my desultory habits of study, which I find not always avoidable - Continue to be my good genius, you have already made me wiser & happier, yes! you have benefitted me in various ways - yet, some powerful spells still remain to be dissolved, some dangerous relapses to be averted - I claim, now your assistance & friendship, & claim them with more [ ] nor do I, like Mr Thelwall, wish you to be [ignorant] of my errors.[8]

I do not want to learn to moderate my pleasurable sensations, those which friendly & intellectual intercourse never fail to afford me, but I shou'd be glad to get rid of certain exquisitely painful & poignant emotions, that are but too apt to recur to minds of a certain texture.

I reserve the second perusal of the political justice for a period of more leisure & quietness of spirit, for my feelings have been again, I cannot help it, sadly harrow'd up - these exquisite sensibilities, however generated, have tortured me thro' life, & I sometimes, even still, forbode they will terminate fatally - you, will do me good, if any body can - oh! how agonizing & incessant are the struggles between truth & error in a mind of ardour! I have been endeavouring cooly to philosophize, I cou'd, had I follow'd the bent of my inclinations, rather have dissolved my womanish fears - I thought my mind had acquired more strength, but some circumstance, not altogether concerning myself, have brought on a relapse of this morbid depression - but for this, you wou'd probably have heard sooner from me[9] - yet, I again repeat, I know no one so capable of preserving me from myself - but you will have your labours so often to renew, that I fear you will at

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6 Corregio, 'I, too, am a painter'. On seeing Raphael's 'St Cecilia' at Bologna c.1525. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 163.

7 Holcroft translated *Essaies sur Physiognomie* in 1789.

8 John Thelwall (1764-1834) a leading radical of the 1790s.

9 The concluding NB suggests that this depression was probably occasioned by Mary Wollstonecraft who had made a second suicide attempt in October by jumping into the Thames off Putney Bridge. The next few months produced desperate attempts at a reconciliation with Imlay and the final break does not occur until March 1796. See Tomalin, chapter 15.

length conclude me not worth the effort. - I have done with this - curiosity prompted me to peep into the advanced parts of your system, in this new edition, which I found far less objectionable - I have ever been an advocate for individual attachments from conceiving, that they may be the source of our greatest improvements & most delicious pleasures, the first advantage I have experienced - the last, from untoward circumstances, never - tho' this perhaps is saying too much!

I have lately seen you only in company, when you have leisure, may I expect a more disengaged, uninterrupted, conversation - We can speak, with certainty, only of what we have experienced, I therefore will say, that Mr Godwins gentle, courteous, patient, yet impressive, method of investigation has, while awakening my faculties, banished my timidity, & excited my grateful respect & esteem! Mary Hays

One word more respecting individual affections, I suspect, that were we too rigorously to strip them of their illusions & banish all the partialities that cling to them, those ardent incitements & exquisite gratifications which I hinted at, wou'd lose their energy, for what character will bear to be view'd with a microscopic eye? & without a degree of enthusiasm every effort will be languid - I am aware of the fatal extreme to which this may be carried, & of the agonizing reluctance with which we admit, in some cases a retraction of judgement.

NB I have been occupied with the concerns of a friend, who is unwell & unhappy, or you wou'd have heard from me earlier. Thursday & Saturday I shall be, also, engaged - but let it not be long before I see you.

Letter 16: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

I love to flatter myself sometimes, as well as to be flatter'd, & I felt a pleasure in believing your last visit, so prompt, so immediately succeeding my letter, was a new instance of your kindness & friendship. I am affected by the pains you take to heal & benefit my wayward mind, still more by the humane & delicate consideration which, amidst your just reproofs, you shew for my feelings, & I grieve that those pains have not been more efficacious! Yet, I must indeed have been insensible, & unworthy of your benevolent exertions had they not produced some powerful consequences. Yes! your writings, which fell into my hands at a critical period, & your subsequent conversations have greatly relieved me, & will, I hope, at length rescue me from a more than poetical despondency.- But some severe struggles, I doubt, are still in reserve for me. You have inspired me with confidence, & I will one day (I cannot, at present, say when) draw up for your perusal a sketch of the incidents, few & therefore distinctly marked, which have formed my character.[2] I am encouraged to hope, that this may not be wholly uninteresting to you, & I will study to be brief. I consider you as my mind's physician, I ought therefore to give you an opportunity of forming a full & candid judgement of my case: my communications will be of a delicate nature, they must therefore be held sacred, to yourself alone!

I sometimes blush after you have left me from the recollection of the many follies & weaknesses I have betray'd; among which feminine foibles make no inconsiderable share: I mean, by feminine foibles, those errors which result from the present absurd systems of female education. There is a tenacity in some parts of my character, a proneness to habit, which makes the reformation of my mistakes at a great distance from their detection: this, perhaps, proceeds from the small number of my impressions, their consequent force & distinctness!

You have charged me I think, with sometimes explaining away in conversation the positions I have stated on paper, if this indeed be the case, it can arise only from two causes, the one, a want of clearness in forming, & precision in stating, my opinions; the other, some new point of view in which your observations place them; the latter, I frequently experience, & consequently have been betray'd into a wavering, indecisive manner, if not into apparent contradiction. The nature of our intercourse is likewise, to me, disadvantageous, as in replying to your remarks I have no written memorial to refer to, but am obliged to trust to my recollection, a recollection often harass'd & disturbed by a variety of different impressions.

I think I can, now, clearly distinguish the terms cause & effect from antecedent & consequent - the former imply knowledge, the latter confess ignorance - but I do not, at present find from the distinction any very important changes produced in my preconceived

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1 Undated but traced to January 1796 by the Holcroft incident mentioned in the postscript.

2 The material for *Memoirs*.

notions.[3] We certainly have no other ground for the expectation of successive events than our previous experience, but that does not, altogether, prove to me, whether there may, or may not, be between them a strict, necessary, connection. Arrangement, and adaptation, will equally suit my hypothesis of design to a designer.- To use your illustration, if the pictures in my library are constantly hung in certain forms, that exhibit each in its proper light & most advantageous point of view, both with respect to itself & those which surround it, my taste & judgement will be evidently inferr'd tho' the pictures have no necessary relation to each other. - This, perhaps, you will call trifling, but I confess, the difficulties of atheism appear to me, at present, equally, if not still more, insuperable than those of theism. - or, at least, I am inclined to say, with Madame Roland - 'When I walk, or muse, in a reflecting humour, with my soul at peace, in the midst of a rural scene, the charms of which I enjoy, I find it delicious to refer all these blessings to a supreme intelligence. I then love, & wish to believe in such a one. It is only amidst the dust of the closet, in growing pale over books, or in the vortex of the world, in breathing the corruption of man, that sentiment withers, & that a melancholy reason expands amidst the clouds of doubt & the vapours of incredulity'.

Excuse this quote, it is some time, I believe, since I have offended in this way.

Respecting the subject of friendship & the affections, we do not, I have a notion, greatly differ. I have before hinted my approbation of the general principles which you have stated, in your second edition, upon those topics.[4] In the 1st, I own, I was a little alarmed, because I thought the opinions there advanced liable to be misconstrued, & wrested into an apology for libertinism. Every species of gross intemperance, I confess, excites in my mind the same sensations of disgust & abhorrence, which I feel from observing the swine wallowing in the mire: drunkenness, glutton'y, all excessive sensuality, appear to me mean, vile, selfish, sordid, degrading propensities, which have a tendency to quench all that is grand, affecting, & elevating, in the human mind. This may, in part, be the effect of taste & habit, but I conceive it to be chiefly deduced from a much higher principle: yet, I am neither cold, prudish, nor affected - chaste, virtuous, & individual, affection, I believe to be one of the highest, most delicate, & most ineffable, sources of our satisfactions - the libertine, even as a mere voluptuary, I should suspect is impolitic, & only brutalizes, true pleasure must result from all the complicated, affecting, generous, associations & sympathies, which give to rational nature, on all occasions, its exalted pre-eminence. You have given me encouragement to scribble to you without reserve, & you may perceive how I avail myself of it - when I weary you hint to me, that a l& too much exhausted shou'd sometimes lay fallow for a while, to recruit itself & recover its fertility. I need not add, the satisfaction I always experience from your society, because it must be sufficiently evident. Do not be ceremonious about hours, you wou'd not wish to find me idle, I trust, I have a

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3 Compare Letter 15.

4 Published October 1795. See chapter three of this study.

great deal of the social passion, & can cheerfully lay by every employment, whether domestic or otherwise, for the higher gratification of friendship & conversation. The hour you last call'd was perfectly convenient & agreeable to me, & if I wish'd it had been earlier, it was merely that your visit might have been longer.

I am grown idle, or dissipated, or my attention has been distracted, I can scarcely tell which, but I had intended copying fair the little I had written towards my projected work, & troubling you with it as a specimen, but I can find no time, am always busy, yet do nothing.

Thus far I had written before I met you in Newman Street, & I send it you merely in compliance with your request.[5]

I felt as if I had disgusted your friend by interrupting the discussion on Sunday evening; I cou'd perceive his politeness struggled with his sensations; he was on the point of replying to what you had last advanced, when I seized the interval of conversation to take my leave, to which I was reluctantly impell'd by various motives.[6] I confess, I felt inclined to take Mr Holcroft's side in the argument, for tho' your observations, within certain limits, were incontrovertibly just, I cannot but think, that there has been a great waste of attention & intellect in continually repeating the same facts & going over the same ground. Past experience, undoubtedly, affords the only basis for future enquiries, but I do not perceive the utility of endless repetition, ought we not rather to press forward, when we have once established our data, than be content thus to tread in a circle? Shall I likewise add, that highly as I reverence criticism, I cannot help suspecting, that there has been a great deal of superstitious, labourious, trifling, among commentators on ancient literature. I am probably giving a proof of presumption by thus hazarding my opinions, but I trust them to your candour, & shall be willing to receive further information on the subject.

I like your friend, though I can perceive his faults, they appear to me to rise out of a generous source - Where there is A,B,C, (says Lavater) there will be D,E,F[7] - the excess of our virtues shade, almost imperceptibly, into vices. I cou'd forgive a thousand errors in a frank, energetic, ardent, mind![8] they are the luxuriant branches of a vigorous plant, they

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5 Between Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road. Holcroft lived in Newman Street.

6 Godwin replies 'I have not the slightest suspicion of you having disgusted Mr Holcroft by interrupting the discussion on Sunday by your departure'. See Letter 17.

7 See Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man*, 3rd edn (Dublin: [n. pub.], 1790) pp. 178-79. The aphorism reads: 'that you may know where d, e, f, is, there must be a, b, c: he alone has knowledge of man, who knows the ferment that raises each character, and makes it that which it shall be, and something more or less than it shall be.'

8 Also quoted in *Letters and Essays* p. 49. See also *De l'Esprit*, pp. 305-12 (p. 307): 'great abilities always suppose strong passions; that strong passions produce a thousand irregularities; and that, on the contrary, what is called good conduct, is almost always the effect of the absence of the passions, and consequently the appendage of moderate abilities. It requires strong passions to form the great, of what kind soever, of the exclusive Qualities of the Mind and Soul'.

grow on the stem of virtue, &, not unfrequently, enrich, ultimately, the soil which gave them birth - 'A God, an animal, a plant, are not companions for man, nor are the faultless'.[9] Cou'd we wholly erradicate, what appears to us the foibles of every estimable character, we shou'd, perhaps, destroy the ferment which gives rise to their highest excellencies. What are energies, but passions? &, in the present imperfect state of things, those passions will, at times, necessarily degenerate into excess.

You accused me, of not seeming to participate in the hilarity of the circle, on Sunday, shall I own, the party was too large for me; I did not feel at ease, & beside, my attention was occupied by observing them individually. I have no great relish for what is term'd wit & humour, I never had, this will, perhaps, injure me in your estimation, I cannot help it, when I write to you I write confessions. I am excessively selfish, I feel the social passion ardently & intensely, but my heart & my understanding only delight to expand in the small circle of affection & friendship. I cherish a benevolence for, & wish well to, all mankind, to every rational, to every sensitive, being, & shou'd rejoice to be aiding, in the smallest degree, the grand effort for the melioration, for the happiness of society, & yet, inconsistent that I am, my attachments have the narrowness & the tenacity of a savage.- I cou'd trace all this, step by step, I could analyse into its first & simplest principles, &, while I perceive & feel, deplore the fatal mechanism! Instead of reproving me for the melancholy which too frequently pervades my my spirit, did you know all I have suffer'd, & how much I have been excruciated by high-wrought feelings, by a peculiar combination of circumstances, you would rather wonder at my mind's elasticity! Still, I am not 'ill-humour'd', as a proof of it, I have always been beloved by my family, my friends, my acquaintance, & domestics. - so careful am I not to inflict pain, that I wou'd put myself to great inconvenience rather than, wilfully, wound & incommode a reptile in my path. I pant for happiness myself, & I wou'd, had I the power universally communicate it. - Sorrow has softened my heart, but not sour'd it, in early life I was irascible, but the fervor of my temper is now almost subdued; my sufferings have not been of a nature to create asperity because I have no injuries to complain of - I have known only good & humane people, if they have wounded me, it has not been intentionally, but either from being unable to conceive my feelings, or from unavoidable circumstances. I have met with no ingratitude, no deception, neither treachery nor profligacy, were I to judge of the world merely from the part of it with which I have been conversant, my judgement wou'd, indeed, be most favorable! - I hate suspicion, I have no distrusts, I delight to confide, & I confide fearlessly - yet, much of misery has been my portion, but that misery has arisen out of general rather

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9 *Aphorisms on Man: Translated from the original manuscript of the Rev. John Caspar Lavater Citizen of Zurich* (London: Johnson, 1788), pp. 218-19. Aphorism 630 reads: A *god*, an *animal*, a *plant*, are not companions of man; nor is the *faultless* - then judge with lenity of all: the coolest, wisest, best, all without exception, have their points, their moments of enthusiam, fanaticism, absence of mind, faint-heartedness, stupidity - if you allow not for these, your criticisms on man will be a mass of accusations or caricatures'. Also quoted in *Monthly Magazine* (1797), pp. 180-81 (p. 181), and *Letters and Essays*, p. 121.

than individual mistakes. I will not apologize, my heart unfolds itself to you with pleasure, because it is persuaded that you understand its emotions - I know nothing of physiognomy, I have little discernment in mind if, notwithstanding your philosophy & advancement, you have not possess'd a great share of those exquisite sensibilities which prey on me. I am proud of, I rejoice in your friendship, & I hope, still, to reap from it further benefits.

I have been reading your chapter on good & evil, the observations it contains are just, wise, & benevolent, but the picture of human misery is but too real! - Hence, in all ages, the ardent yearnings after immortality.[10]

10 *Political Justice*, 2nd edn, pp. 439-63, where Godwin discusses 'the pleasures of disinterestedness', 'benevolence' 'virtue' and 'the doctrine of necessity'. This chapter is not included in the first edition.

Letter 17: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

I will do myself the pleasure of waiting on you on Friday, & shall be happy to meet Mrs. Wolstencraft [sic], of whom I know not that I ever said a word of harm, & who has frequently amused herself with depreciating me.[2] But I trust you acknowledge in me the reality of a habit upon which I pique myself, that I speak of the qualities of others uninfluenced by personal considerations, & am as prompt to do justice to an enemy as to a friend.

I have not the slightest suspicion of you having disgusted Mr. Holcroft by interrupting the discussion on Sunday by your departure.

Tuesday, 11 o'clock.

1 In *Love-Letters*, p. 232.

2 The first meeting between Wollstonecraft and Godwin had not been a success. See Tomalin, pp. 131-32.

Letter 18: HAYS TO GODWIN* [1] Monday night. Jan 11 1796

You think me incapable of heroism, I fear so, &, yet, I am call'd to great exertions - I do not repine at trifles - believe me, I do not! but a blow that has been suspended over my head for days, weeks, months, years, has at length descended, & still I live, & tho' my tears will flow, in spite of my struggles to suppress them, they are not tears of blood - & my heart, though pierced through is not broken![2] My friend! Come & teach me how to be happy - I am wearied with misery - all nature is to me a blank - I shall, I doubt, never be a philosopher - a barbed & invenomed arrow rankles in my bosom - philosophy will not heal the festering wound - But you, tho' a philosopher yourself, will not despise me, you have ever shown a humane & tender consideration for my feelings, it is a proof of the sensibility & of the goodness of your heart, & tho' a dear friend, the other evening, affected to rally you upon it, she has told me, that it has raised you greatly in her esteem. - I was glad to see her so lively tho' I knew the gaiety to be very superficial, she has been a great sufferer & with all her strength of mind, her sufferings had well nigh proved fatal - happy for her, & happy for me she is yet, preserved![3] - I shall ever love her, for her affectionate sympathies, she has a warm & generous heart! Yes, I have many excellent friends, & I am sensible of their value - &, yet, ungrateful that I am - I am exquisitely miserable! - I know you will not chide me till I get more strength - I speak to you of my sorrows, for your gentleness & kindness have inspired me with confidence - & my desolate heart looks round for support! but don't mention my weakness to any one, it will do no good. I have had exertions to make &, I believe, have not acquitted myself very ill - &, now, I sink into helpless, infantine distress! But my mind is not destitute of energy - I have struggled, suffer'd, & conquer'd, before, & by & by I shall again recover - you will still be my good physician, will you not? Call upon me, for the few incidents of my life, & you shall have them, simply, & without disguise - there is nothing extraordinary in them, but the mind upon which they have operated, yet, I suppose, they help'd to form that mind![4]

After all, my friend, what a wretched farce is life! I wou'd willingly sleep & shut my eyes upon it for ever,- but something whispers - this wou'd be wrong. Three times for the second time has been twice repeated have I had to tear from my heart all its darling, close

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* Much of the letter is blotted as if by tears.

1 Compare *Memoirs* (II. pp. 92-5), reproduced as Letter 18A.

2 William Frend had probably occasioned the 'blow', perhaps by an apparent rejection of her affection as depicted in his fictional counterpart, Augustus Harley in *Memoirs*. According to Henry Crabb Robinson, Hays's obsession for Frend continued into the next century when 'his sudden marriage with Miss Blackburne [1808] was a severe blow to her'. See Morley, p.235.

3 Mary Wollstonecraft made two suicide attempts in 1795.

4 See the Preface to *Memoirs* (I, p. 5) which claims that 'the most interesting, and the most useful, fictions, are, perhaps, such, as delineating the progress, and tracing the consequences, of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice, afford materials, by which the philosopher may calculate the powers of the human mind, and learn the springs which set it in motion'. Compare *Monthly Magazine* 4 (1797), p. 181: 'The business of familiar narrative should be to describe life and manners in real or probable situations, to delineate the human mind in its endless varieties, to develope the heart, to paint the passions, to trace the springs of action, to interest the imagination, exercise the affections, and awaken the powers of the mind.'

twisted, associations[5] - the blood seems to follow the rending - & still I live - reserved for what? - I was going to say - God only knows, but I know not whether there be a God - if there be - can he sport himself in the miseries of poor, feeble, creatures, forced into existence without their choice, impell'd by the iron h& of necessity, through mistake into calamity? - But these are not questions to ask you. Who wou'd be born if they cou'd help it? - you wou'd perhaps, for you may do a great deal of good, but I wou'd not, I frankly confess! Torn by conflicting passions, & wasted in anguish - my life is wearing away, a burthen to myself, a trouble to those who love me, & worthless, I doubt, to every one![6] Why is all this, whence came I, & wither am I going? Now, I rejoice that I live alone, for I wou'd not wish to be an hourly sorrow to any one: Yet, I shall not desert myself, I shall employ my mind & seek conversation & society - but weaken'd by long suspence, prey'd upon by a combination of feelings - I fear, I greatly fear, the irrevocable blow is struck! I have not been treated altogether kindly, nor generously - but I blame no one - I have been guilty of many errors myself, yet they have sprung from a generous source - few people are able to conceive my feelings, & who is faultless? - My harrassed mind has seem'd a little reliev'd while pouring itself out on paper - The world wou'd say I hav chosen a strange confident, but if your heart is inaccessible to tender sympathies, I have but added one more to my numberless mistakes.

May be you will call upon me ere long, friday afternoon, I believe I must spend with some friends.

On looking over what I have written, I perceive it is a wild, incoherent, scrall, but it is the effusion of the moment, & you shall have it - I am at present, worn out with fatigue & anxiety - I shall, I trust soon be better.

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5 The first occasion was the death of John Eccles, the second and third presumably when Frend concluded the relationship.

6 Compare Letter 11. Her sister, Eliza, testifies to Mary's fears of her influence on others:

> You sometimes reproach me with want of sensibility - in this you do me injustice - I much doubt whether my feelings are not equally strong with your own - though various circumstances may have rendered them less irritably acute, the only difference between you, and me, is this, - that terrified by your example, it has been the business of my life, to repress sentiments which it has been too much yours, to indulge. [...] - I am neither cold - nor selfish - I am only more cheerful - more rational and not quite such a maniac as my unfortunate favourite sister.

See undated letter, but addressed to 30 Kirby Street, where Hays was living between 1795 and 1798.

This afternoon I received your first sheet, & in compliance with your request, write to inform you that I find it thus far well-written & interesting.

I am under engagement to drink tea with you on Wednesday.

Monday Jan. 18

Letter 18A: EMMA COURTNEY TO MR FRANCIS[1]

You once told me, that I was incapable of heroism; and you were right - yet, I am called to great exertions! a blow that has been suspended over my head, days, weeks, months, years, has at length fallen - still I live! My tears flow - I struggle, in vain, to suppress them, but they are not tears of blood! - My heart, though pierced through and through, is not broken!

My friend, come and teach me how to acquire fortitude - I am wearied with misery - All nature is to me a blank - an envenomed shaft rankles in my bosom - philosophy will not heal the festering wound... *I am exquisitely wretched*!

Do not chide me till I get more strength - I speak to you of my sorrows, for your kindness, while I was yet a stranger to you, inspired me with confidence, and my desolate heart looks round for support.

I am indebted to you - how shall I repay your goodness? Do you, indeed, interest yourself in my fate? Call upon me, then, for the few incidents of my life - I will relate them simply, and without disguise. There is nothing uncommon in them, but the effect which they have produced upon my mind - yet, that mind they formed.

After all, my friend, what a wretched farce is life! Why cannot I sleep, and, close my eyes upon it for ever? But something whispers, "*this would be wrong.*" - How shall I tear from my heart all its darling, close twisted, associations?- And must I live - *live for what*? God only knows! Yet, how am I sure that there is a Goc e wise - is he powerful - is he benevolent? If he be, can he sport himself in the m of poor, feeble, impotent, beings, forced into existence, without their choice - impelled, by the iron hand of necessity, through mistake, into calamity? - Ah! my friend, who will condemn the poor solitary wanderer, whose feet are pierced with many a thorn, should he turn suddenly out of the rugged path, seek an obscure shade to shrowd his wounds, his sorrows, and his indignation, from the scorn of a pitiless world, and accelerate the hour of repose.[2] Who would be born if they could help it? You would perhaps -*you may do good* - But on me, the sun shines only to mock my woes - Oh! that I had never seen the light.

Torn by conflicting passions - wasted in anguish - life is melting fast away - A burthen to myself, a grief to those who love me, and worthless to every one. Weakened by long suspence - preyed upon, by a combination of imperious feelings - I fear, I greatly fear, *the irrecoverable blow is struck!* But I blame no one - I have been entangled in error - *who is faultless*?

While pouring itself out on paper, my tortured mind has experienced a momentary relief: If your heart be inaccessible to tender sympathies, I have only been adding one more to my numberless mistakes!

'EMMA.'

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1 *Memoirs*, II, pp. 92-5.

2 This is the reasoning of a mind distorted by passion. Even in the moment of disappointment, our heroine judged better. See page 69 .

Letter 18B: MR FRANCIS TO EMMA COURTNEY[1]

Your narrative leaves me full of admiration for your qualities, and compassion for your insanity.

I entreat however your attention to the following passage, extracted from your papers. "After considering all I have urged, you may perhaps reply, that the subject is too nice, and too subtle, for reasoning, and that the heart is not to be compelled. This, I think, is a mistake. There is no topic, in fact, that may not be subjected to the laws of investigation and reasoning. What is it we desire? pleasure, happiness. What! the pleasure of an instant, only; or that which is more solid and permanent? I allow, pleasure is the supreme good! but it may be analysed. To this analysis I now call you?"

Could I, if I had studied for years, invent a comment on your story, more salutary to your sorrows, more immoveable in its foundation, more clearly expressed, or more irresistibly convincing to every rational mind?

How few real, substantial, misfortunes there are in the world! how few calamities, the sting of which does not depend upon our cherishing the viper in our bosom, and applying the aspic to our veins! The general pursuit of all men, we are frequently told, is happiness. I have often been tempted to think, on the contrary, that the general pursuit is misery. It is true, men do not recognize it by its genuine appellation; they content themselves with the pitiful expedient of assigning it a new denomination. But, if their professed purpose were misery, could they be more skilful and ingenious in the pursuit?

Look through your whole life. To speak from your own description, was there ever a life, in its present period, less chequered with substantial *bona fide* misfortune? The whole force of every thing which looks like a misfortune was assiduously, unintermittedly, provided by yourself. You nursed in yourself a passion, which, taken in the degree in which you experienced it, is the unnatural and odious invention of a distempered civilization, and which in almost all instances generates an immense over-balance of excruciating misery. Your conduct will scarcely admit of any other denomination than moon-struck madness, hunting after torture. You addressed a man impenetrable as a rock, and the smallest glimpse of sober reflection, and common sense, would have taught you instantly to have given up the pursuit.

I know you will tell me, and you will tell yourself, a great deal about constitution, early association, and the indissoluble chain of habits and sentiments. But I answer with small fear of being erroneous, "It is a mistake to suppose, that the heart is not to be compelled. There is no topic, in fact, that may not be subjected to the laws of investigation and reasoning. Pleasure, happiness, is the supreme good; and happiness is susceptible of being analysed." I grant, that the state of a human mind cannot be changed at once; but, had you worshipped at the altar of reason but half as assiduously as you have

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1 *Memoirs*, II. pp. 96-102. Based on Hays's Letter 20.

sacrificed at the shrine of illusion, your present happiness would have been as enviable, as your present distress is worthy of compassion. If men would but take the trouble to ask themselves, once every day, Why should I be miserable? how many, to whom life is a burthen, would become chearful and contented.

Make a catalogue of all the real evils of human life; bodily pain, compulsory solitude, severe corporal labour, in a word, all those causes which deprive us of health, or the means of spending our time in animated, various, and rational pursuits. Aye, these are real evils! But I should be ashamed of putting disappointed love into my enumeration. Evils of this sort are the brood of folly begotten upon fastidious indolence. They shrink into non-entity, when touched by the wand of truth.

The first lesson of enlightened reason, the great fountain of heroism and virtue, the principle by which alone man can become what man is capable of being, is *independence*. May every power that is favourable to integrity, to honour, defend me from leaning upon another for support! I will use the word, I will use my fellow men, but I will not abuse these invaluable benefits of the system of nature. I will not be weak and criminal enough, to make my peace depend upon the precarious thread of another's life or another's pleasure. I will judge for myself; I will draw my support from myself - the support of my existence and the support of my happiness. The system of nature has perhaps made me dependent for the means of existence and happiness upon my fellow men taken collectively; but nothing but my own folly can make me dependent upon individuals. Will these principles prevent me from admiring, esteeming, and loving such as are worthy to excite these emotions? Can I not have a mind to understand, and a heart to feel excellence, without first parting with the fairest attribute of my nature?

You boast of your sincerity and frankness. You have doubtless some reason for your boast - Yet all your misfortunes seem to have arisen from concealment. You brooded over your emotions, and considered them as a sacred deposit - You have written to me, I have seen you frequently, during the whole of this transaction, without ever having received the slightest hint of it, yet, if I be a fit counsellor now, I was a fit counsellor then; your folly was so gross, that, if it had been exposed to the light of day, it could not have subsisted for a moment. Even now you suppress the name of your hero: yet, unless I know how much of a hero and a model of excellence he would appear in my eyes, I can be but a very imperfect judge of the affair.

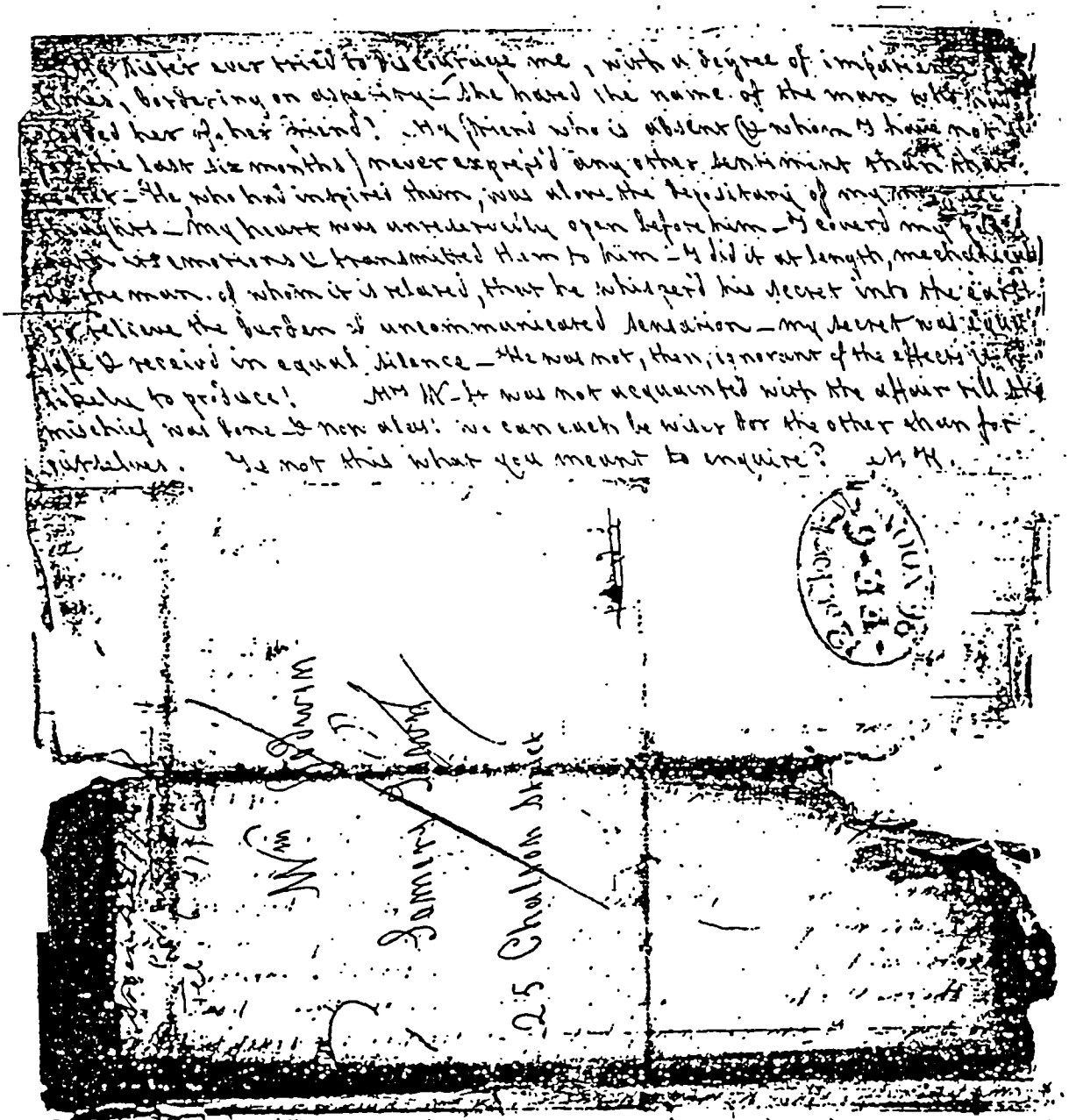
'------FRANCIS.'

Letter 19: GODWIN TO HAYS

This afternoon I received your first sheet, &, in compliance with your request, write to inform you that I find it thus far well-written & interesting.

I am under engagement to drink tea with you on Wednesday.

Monday, Jan. 18



Letter 20: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

You retort upon me my own arguments, & you have cause - I felt a ray of conviction dart upon my mind, even, while I wrote them![2] - But what then? - "I seem'd to be in a state, in which reason had no power - I felt as if I cou'd cooly survey the several arguments of the case - perceive, that they had prudence, truth & common sense of their side - & then answer - I am under the guidance of a director more energetic than you."[3] - Who wrote this sentiment, & had not the writer studied the human heart? I am affected by your kindness - I am affected by your letter - I cou'd weep over it - bitter tears of conviction & remorse! but argue with the wretch infected with the plague - will it stop the tide of blood, that is rapidly carrying its contagion to the heart? I blush! I shed burning tears - but I am still desolate & wretched - & how am I to help it? The force, which you impute to my reasoning, was the powerful frenzy of a high delirium. What does it signify, whether abstractedly consider'd (if there be any such thing as abstraction) a misfortune be worthy of the names, substantial, or real, if the consequences are the same? That which embitters all my life, that which stops the genial current of health & peace, is, whatever be its nature, a substantial calamity to me! There is no end to this reasoning, what individual can limit the desires of another? The necessaries of the civilized man, are whimsical superfluities in the eye of the savage! Are we, or are we not, the creatures of sensation & circumstance? I say, with you - (& the more I look into society, the deeper I feel the soul-sickening conviction) - "the general pursuit is misery" - necessarily - excruciating misery! - from the source to which you justly ascribe it - "the unnatural & odious inventions of a distemper'd civilization". I am content, you may perceive, to recognise things by their "genuine appellations". I am at least, a reasoning maniac[4] - perhaps the most dangerous species of insanity - but while the source continues troubled, why expect the streams to run pure? "You know, I will tell you about the indissoluble chains of association & habit" - & you attack me again with my own arms - Alas! while I confess their impotence, with what consistency do I accuse the flinty, impenetrable, heart, I so earnestly sought, in vain to move? - What materials, does this stubborn mechanism of the mind, offer to the wise & benevolent legislator![5] Had I, you say, "worship'd at the altar of reason but half as assidiously as I have sacrificed at the shrine of illusion, my happiness might have been enviable."- But, do you not perceive, that my reason was the auxiliary of my passion - or rather, my passion the generative principle of my reason?[6] Had not these contradictions, these oppositions, roused my mind into

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1 The letter has November written on it but it is clearly postmarked 6 February 1796. The emotional response is more appropriate to the later date.

2 This letter, which presumably includes quotations from Godwin's reply to Letter 18, is reproduced almost verbatim as II, chapter 12 of *Memoirs*. See Letter 20A.

3 *Caleb Williams*, ed. by McCracken, p. 154.

4 This seems to be a response to an avowal of her 'insanity' if Mr Francis' letter is based on a reply by Godwin. See Letter 20B.

5 An echo of Hevetius prominent mention of the role of 'the legislator' in *De l'Esprit*, pp. 120-21.

6 See chapter three in this study on the Helvetian importance of 'the passions' in producing 'genius'.

energy, I might have continued tamely domesticating in the lap of indolence & apathy. I do ask myself every day "why shou'd I be miserable?"- & answer - Because the strong, predominant, sentiment of my soul, close-twisted with all its cherish'd associations, has been rudely rent away - & the blood follows from the lacerated wound! You wou'd be ashamed of putting disappointed love into your ennumeration of evils - Gray, was not ashamed of this -

"And pining love shall waste their youth,
And jealousy, with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the secret heart!"
These shall the stings of falsehood try,
And hard unkindness' alter'd eye
That mocks the tear it forc'd to flow."[7]

-Is it possible that you can be insensible of the mighty mischiefs it has cast - Of the great events & changes in society, to which it has operated as a spring? That Jupiter shrouded his glories beneath a mortal form - that he descended yet lower, & crawled as a reptile - That Hercules took the distaff, & Samson was shorn of his strength, are, in their spirit, no fables - yet, these were the legends of ages less degenerate than this, & states of society less corrupt! Ask your own heart, whether some of its most exquisite sensations have not arisen from sources which, to nine tenths of the world, wou'd be as inconceivable? Mine, I believe, is almost a solitary madness in the 18th century - it is not on the altars of love, but of gold, that men now come to pay their offerings. The man who has sacrificed me, if I am not much mistaken, is a votary at the shrine of Plutus, & has had some struggles to ice his heart & stifle his humanity. Why call woman, miserable, oppress'd, & impotent, woman, crushed & then insulted - why call her to an "independence" which not nature, but the accursed & barbarous laws of society have denied her? - This is mockery - even you - wise & benevolent as you are - can mock the child of slavery & of sorrow! Ah! let me follow your example &, again, address you in your own words - "Excluded as it were by the pride, luxury, & caprice of the world, from expanding my sensations & wedding my soul

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7 Thomas Gray, 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', 1742. The two stanzas read:

These shall the fury Passions tear,
The vulturs of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that sculks behind;
Or pineing Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the secret heart,
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visag'd comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

Ambition this shall tempt to rise,
Then whirl the wretch from high,
To bitter Scorn a sacrifice,
And grinning Infamy.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' alter'd eye,
That mocks the tear it forc'd to flow;
And keen Remorse with blood defil'd,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.

to society, I was constrain'd to bestow the strong affections, that glow'd consciously within me, upon a few."[8] Love, in minds of any elevation, cannot be generated but upon a real or fancied, foundation of excellence - But what wou'd be a miracle in architecture is true in morals - the fabric can exist when the foundation has moulder'd away - habit, daily, produces this wonderful effect upon every principle & every feeling - This is your own theory![9]

Am I not sufficiently ingenuous? - I will give you a new proof of my frankness (if not the proof you require) - It is from chastity having been render'd a sexual virtue, that all these calamities have flow'd[10] - Men are by this means render'd sordid & dissolute in their pleasures; their affections blunted & their feelings petrified: they are incapable of satisfying the heart of a woman of sensibility & virtue - supposing such a woman has the power (which I believe is not often the case) of fixing, in any degree their attentions! - Half the sex, then, are the infamous, wretched, victims of brutal instinct - the other half - if they sink not in mere frivolity & insipidity - are sublimated into a sort of - what shall I call them? - refined, romantic, unfortunate, factitious, beings, who cannot [ ] to act, for the sake of the present moment, in a manner, that shou'd expose them to complicated, inevitable, evils - evils, that will, almost, infallibly overwhelm them with misery & regret! - And beside which, their refinements, however factitious, are, in time, incorporated into, & become a part of, the real character. Woe be, more especially to those who, possessing the dangerous gifts of fancy & feeling, find it as difficult to discover a substitute for the object as for the sentiment! You, who are a philosopher, will you still controvert the sentiment founded in truth & nature? "Gross" as is my "folly", (& I do not deny it) you may perceive, I was not wholly wandring in darkness - but, while the wintry sun of hope illumined the fairy frost-work with a single, slanting, ray, dazzled by the transient brightness I dreaded the meridian fervors that shou'd dissolve the glitt'ring charm. Yes! it was madness, but it was the pleasurable madness which none but madmen know! But to what purpose disgust you, & exhaust myself, by this never ending amplification?

I cannot answer one of your questions, do not pain me by the repitition of it, neither seek to ensnare me to the disclosure (forgive me) - unkindly, severely, as I have been treated, I will not risque even the possibility of injuring the man I have so tenderly loved in the esteem of any one - & were I to name him, you cou'd have but little opportunity of judgeing of his qualities. - He is not a "model of excellence" - I perceive it with pain, & I have been obliged to retract my judgement on some parts of his character with agonizing reluctance. - But I cou'd trace the sources of his errors, & candor & self-abasement imperiously compel me to a mild judgement - to stifle the petulant suggestions of a

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8 *Memoirs* II, p. 108, attributes this to *Caleb Williams* but I have failed to trace it in the first edition or in the variants. See also Letter 32, note 1.

9 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 283-304, and 2nd edn, I, p. 425, where Godwin argues that voluntary actions are produced as a result of experience or habit.

10 See also *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 193-195, and Letter 13.

wounded spirit! Ought not our principles, my friend, to soften the asperity of our censures? Could I have won him to my arms, I thought that I cou'd [elevate] & purify his mind - a mind in which I still perceive a great proportion of good - I weep for him as well as for myself! - he will one day know my value & regret my loss! I do not see the utility of your last question, but I will answer it nevertheless - you have a claim upon my grateful respect & esteem - A thousand delicacies mingling with the late transactions, prevented me (I do not pretend to consistency) from making many confidences - &, yet, concealment is particularly repugnant to my disposition - you are the only man existing, beside him concern'd, who have any knowledge of the circumstances. Between one sister, Elizabeth, & myself, every thought has been, from infancy in common - Another friend, a young woman of virtue & talents (now many miles from the Metropolis)[11] acquired a partial knowledge of my situation from local & unavoidable circumstances - And, lately, a strong sympathy of feeling, & similarity, in some respects, of situation, has produced an unreserved communication of friendship & confidence between Mrs Woolstonecraft & myself - from her I also conceal'd a name I cou'd wish for ever blotted from my memory, but a combination of circumstances, thro' a family (unknown to me) connected with both parties led her to discovery, which I have earnestly enjoin'd her not to disclose. I repeat - This precaution is not at all on my own account, but the contrary! I feel, that by my extravagance I have given a great deal of vexation, & some degradation to a being whom I had no right to persecute, or to compel to chuse happiness through a medium of my creation. I cannot exactly tell the extent of the injury I may have done him - a long train of consequences succeed, even, our most indifferent actions - strong energies, if they answer not the end proposed, cannot be unattended with some powerful effects - morals & mechanics are here analogous[12] - Do not, then, do not distress me by the repetition of a question I cannot answer - if my folly must have a victim, let it be myself! I cannot say how much your prompt perusal of the papers, & eloquent, friendly, remonstrance has gratified & affected me - I have, & will, peruse it again & again. - I shall see you, I hope, ere long, it is necessary, at present, to save me from myself. MH

Do you wonder, at the interest I felt in the fate of the artless, affectionate, Emily Melville - That I lamented in Falkland, the mind of promise destroy'd by one strong prejudice - That I sympathised in the restless, ardent, curiosity of Caleb Williams?[13] I look'd into my own heart, read its responsive emotions, & respected the writer who cou'd thus, analyzing the consequences back to their sources, penetrate into the recesses of the mind.

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11 See William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: the Biography of a Family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 158, which confirms that Wollstonecraft was spending some weeks in the country.

12 See chapter three in this study which discusses Helvetius on thwarted passions.

13 Characters in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, 1794.

One more observation & I have done - That we can "admire, esteem, & love," an individual - (for love in the abstract conveys to me no idea) - which must be in fact, depending upon that individual for a large share of our felicity - & not lament their loss, in proportion to our apprehension of their worth, appears to me a proposition, involving in itself an absurdity, demonstrably false.

I wish you had ever loved!

Friday morng

I replied to your letter on the evening on which I [received it] & threw it by, for a day or two - Run'ing my eye over what I have written I perceive, that dazzled by the force of your expressions, I have granted you too much. My conduct was not altogether so insane as I have been willing to allow. It is certain, that, cou'd I have gained the end propos'd, my happiness wou'd have been encreas'd - I will say, with my friend Mrs W, "It is necessary for me to love & admire or I sink into sadness". And the behaviour of the man I sought to move was too inconsistent to be entirely the result of indifference. To be rous'd & stimulated by obstacles - & those obstacles admitting hope because obscurely seen - is no mark of weakness![14] Cou'd I have conquer'd, what I conceiv'd to be, the prejudices of a worthy man, I could have encreas'd his happiness as well as my own. I deeply reason'd & philosophised upon the subject - perseverence, with little ability, has been known to effect wonders: perhaps I flatter'd myself, that I had the power of uniting some ability with perseverance, & confiding in that power, I was the dupe of my own reason! Even now, the affair, altogether, appears to me a sort of phenominon which I am unable to solve - I doubt, if there be another man in existence who cou'd have acted, exactly, the part this man has done - how then was I to take such a part into my calculations? - I mean not to say - it is a miracle, that I did not inspire affection - perhaps, on this subject, the mortification I have endured has humbled me, even unduely in my own eyes, my pride has suffer'd little less than my heart, tho' I have not given its emotions words - What ever I might have felt, I wou'd have disdain'd to express the rage of slighted love - neither was this, with me, a predominant emotion: yet, I feel the power of those charming lines of Pope -

"Unequal task, a passion to resign
For hearts so touch'd, so pierc'd, so lost, as mine!
Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state
How often must it love, how often hate,
How often hope, despair, resent, regret,
Conceal, disdain, do all things - but forget!"[15]

Will you allow me another quotation?

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14 See *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), p. 358, where Hays argues that 'misfortune and difficulty put the mind upon collecting its powers; the disappointment or the calamity which does not overwhelm and stupify, stimulates, awakens the stronger passions, sets the mind in motion, rouses those energies which, in the lap of indolence, had never existed'.

15 'Eloise to Abelard', 1717, 195-200.

"Love, various minds, doth variously inspire
It stirs, in gentle natures, gentle fire,
Like that of incense, on the altar laid!
But raging flames, tempestuous souls invade
A fire, which every windy passion blows,
With pride it mounts, & with revenge it glows."[16]

The former discription bears the most resemblance to my mind. - But to return. I pursued what I was convinc'd, if attain'd, wou'd be, comparitively, a certain good, & when, at times, discouraged - I have said to myself - What! after taking all this trouble, shall I relinquish my efforts when perhaps, on the verge of success? - To say nothing of the pain of forcing an active mind out of its trains - And if I desisted, what was to be the result?[17] - The sensation I, at present experience! - apathy, stagnation, abhorr'd vacuity - You cannot resist the force of my reasoning, for tho', I am convinced you never felt similar emotions, you yet, know the human heart - you, who cou'd paint, in colours true to nature, the frenzied curiosity of a Caleb Williams, the romantic honor of a Falkland - you, who admire the destructive courage of an Alexander, even, the fanatic fury of a Ravillac[18] [...] you, who, if I am not much mistaken, pant with a love of distinction (even separated from [ ] that bespeaks the powerful, energetic, mind - Why, [effect] to be intolerant to a passion, tho' differing [ ] generated in the same principles, & by a parallel process? The capacity of receiving sensation is the power - Into what channels this shall be directed, depends not on ourselves - Are we not the creatures of outward impression, & without such impression, sho' we be any thing? - Are not passions & powers the same thing, for can the latter be generated without the lively interest that constitutes the former - annihilate the one, & what becomes of the other?[19] With the apostle Paul, permit me to say - "I am not mad, but speak the words of truth & soberness".[20] To what purpose did you read my confessions, but to trace in them a character, form'd like every other human character, by the chain of necessary [events, the] result of unavoidable impressions? I feel that my arguments are incontrovertible - I suspect, that, by affecting to deny their force, you will endeavour to deceive either me or yourself. - I have acquired the power of reasoning on this subject at a dear rate - at the expence of inconceivable suffering - do not attempt to deny me the miserable, expensive, victory! - I am ready to say (ungrateful that I am!) why did you put me upon calling forth my strong reasons? I perceive that there is no cure for me (for apathy is the morbid energy of the soul, not the restoration to health) but by a new train of impressions, of what ever nature, equally forcible with the past.- You will tell me, it remains with myself whether I will predetermine to resist them - Is this true - is it

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16 Dryden *Tyrannic Love: or, the Royal Martyr. A Tragedy* (1669), II, 292 - 97.

17 See *Monthly Magazine*, 9 (1800), pp. 523 - 24, where Hays discusses treatment for mania.

18 See *Political Justice*, I, p. 6, and p. 99. Hays misses the point Godwin is making that both characters were either part of a coercive system of government or victims of self-deception.

19 See Helvetius, *De l'Esprit*, chapters 5 and 6.

20 Acts 26. 25.

philosophical - ask yourself? What! can even you shrink from the consequences of your own principles? - But I only use vain repetition!

One word more, respecting the confidents I have made. My sister ever tried to discourage me, with a degree of impatience, at times, bordering on asperity - 'She hated the name of the man who had robbed her of her friend'. My friend who is absent (& whom I have not seen for the last six months) never express'd any other sentiment than that of regret.[21] - He, who had inspired them, was alone the depository of my most secret thoughts - My heart was unreservedly open before him - I coverd my paper with its emotions & transmitted them to him - I did it at length, mechanically, as the man, of whom it is related, that he whisper'd his secret into the earth to relieve the burden of uncommunicated sensation[22] - my secret was equally safe & receivd in equal silence - He was not, then, ignorant of the effects it was likely to produce! Mrs W - ft was not acquainted with the affair till the mischief was done - & now alas! we can each be wiser for the other than for ourselves. Is not this what you meant to enquire? MH

In the last letter I address'd to - (of which you have a part of the copy) I ask'd the return of my letters. - 'I wish (said I) to employ myself in a work of fiction, to engage my mind, to sluice off its impressions. A philosophical delineation of the errors of passion, of the mischiefs of yeilding to the illusions of the imagination, might be useful - Nothing cooly written cou'd express, with equal force, the feelings, mistakes & miseries, I mean to depicture. I have only some imperfect copies of the papers in question - they may afford materials for my plan[23] - It was necessary (I added) for my mind to be [employed] but I cou'd not write of what I had not felt. This was the plain & [simple] reason of my requesting the letters - I had no distrust either of his honor or delicacy - This my whole conduct had proved - &, in those respects, my opinions had receiv'd no alteration - Three weeks have nearly elaps'd & I have neither letters nor reply - He does not vouchsafe to answer me.

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21 Possibly Mary Wollstonecraft.

22 Apollo gave Midas a pair of ass's ears which were discovered by his barber who 'not daring to mention the matter, dug a hole and relieved his mind by whispering in it "Midas has ass's ears", then covering it up again'. See *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 14th edn, p. 727.

23 'and the circumstances might be sufficiently disguised to delude impertinent curiosity!' crossed through.

Letter 20A: EMMA COURTNEY TO MR FRANCIS[1]

'You retort upon me my own arguments, and you have cause. I felt a ray of conviction dart upon my mind, even, while I wrote them. But what then? - "I seemed to be in a state, in which reason had no power; I felt as if I could coolly survey the several arguments of the case - perceive, that they had prudence, truth, and common sense on their side - And then answer - I am under the guidance of a director more energetic than you!"[2] I am affected by your kindness - I am affected by your letter. I could weep over it, bitter tears of conviction and remorse. But argue with the wretch infected with the plague - will it stop the tide of blood, that is rapidly carrying its contagion to the heart? I blush! I shed burning tears! But I am still desolate and wretched! And how am I to stop it? The force which you impute to my reasoning was the powerful frenzy of a high delirium.

What does it signify whether, abstractedly considered, a misfortune be worthy of the names real and substantial, if the consequences produced are the same? That which embitters all my life, that which stops the genial current of health and peace is, whatever be its nature, a real calamity to me. There is no end to this reasoning - what individual can limit the desires of another? The necessaries of the civilized man are whimsical superfluities in the eye of the savage. Are we, or are we not (as you have taught me) the creatures of sensation and circumstance?

I agree with you - and the more I look into society, the deeper I feel the soul-sickening conviction - "The general pursuit is misery" - necessarily - excruciating misery, from the source to which you justly ascribe it - "*The unnatural and odious inventions of a distempered civilization.*" I am content, you may perceive, to recognize things by their genuine appellation. I am, at least, a reasoning maniac: perhaps the most dangerous species of insanity. But while the source continues troubled, why expect the streams to run pure?

You know I will tell you - "about the indissoluble chains of association and habit:" and you attack me again with my own weapons! Alas! while I confess their impotence, with what consistency do I accuse the flinty, impenetrable, heart, I so earnestly sought, in vain, to move? What materials does this stubborn mechanism of the mind offer to the wise and benevolent legislator!

Had I, you tell me, "worshipped at the altar of reason, but half as assiduously as I have sacrificed at the shrine of illusion, my happiness might have been enviable." But do you not perceive, that my reason was the auxiliary of my passion, or rather my passion the generative principle of my reason? Had not these contradictions, these oppositions, roused the energy of my mind, I might have domesticated, tamely, in the lap of indolence and apathy.

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1 *Memoirs*, II, pp. 103-117.

2 Godwin's Caleb Williams.

I do ask myself, every day - "Why should I be miserable?" - and I answer, "Because the strong, predominant, sentiment of my soul, close twisted with all its cherished associations, has been rudely torn away, and the blood flows from the lacerated wound. You would be ashamed of placing disappointed love in your enumeration of evils! Gray was not ashamed of this-

'And pining love shall waste their youth,
And jealous, with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the secret heart!'

'These shall the stings of falsehood try,
And hard unkindness' alter'd eye,
That mocks the tear it forc'd to flow.'

Is it possible that you can be insensible of all the mighty mischiefs which have been caused by this passion - of the great events and changes of society, to which it has operated as a powerful, though secret, spring? That Jupiter shrouded his glories beneath a mortal form; that he descended yet lower, and crawled as a reptile - that Hercules took the distaff, and Sampson was shorn of his strength, are in their spirit, no fables. Yet, these were the legends of ages less degenerate than this, and states of society less corrupt. Ask your own heart - whether some of its most exquisite sensations have not arisen from sources, which, to nine-tenths of the world, would be equally inconceivable: Mine, I believe, is a *solitary madness in the eighteenth century: it is not on the altars of love, but of gold, that men, now, come to pay their offerings.*

Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman - *crushed, and then insulted* - why call her to *independence* - which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? *This is mockery*! Even you, wise and benevolent as you are, can mock the child of slavery and sorrow! "Excluded, as it were, by the pride, luxury, and caprice, of the world, from expanding my sensations, and wedding my soul to society, I was constrained to bestow the strong affections, that glowed consciously within me, upon a few."[3] Love, in minds of any elevation, cannot be generated but upon a real, or fancied, foundation of excellence. But what would be a miracle in architecture, is true in morals - the fabric can exist when the foundation has mouldered away. *Habit* daily produces this wonderful effect upon every feeling, and every principle. Is not this the theory which you have taught me?

Am I not sufficiently ingenuous? - I will give you a new proof of my frankness (though not the proof you require). - From the miserable consequences of wretched moral distinctions, from chastity having been considered as a sexual virtue, all these calamities have flowed. Men are thus rendered sordid and dissolute in their pleasures; their affections vitiated, and their feelings petrified; the simplicity of modest tenderness loses its charm; they become incapable of satisfying the heart of a woman of sensibility and

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3 Godwin's Caleb Williams.

virtue. - Half the sex, then, are the wretched, degraded, victims of brutal instinct: the remainder, if they sink not into mere frivolity and insipidity, are sublimed into a sort of - [what shall I call them?] - refined, romantic, factitious, unfortunate, beings; who, for the present moment, dare not expose themselves to complicated, inevitable, evils; evils, that will infallibly overwhelm them with misery and regret! Woe be, more especially, to those who, possessing the dangerous gifts of fancy and feeling, find it as difficult to discover a substitute for the object as for the sentiment! You, who are a philosopher, will you still controvert the principles founded in truth and nature? "Gross as is my folly," (and I do not deny it) "you may perceive I was not wholly wandering in darkness. But while the wintry sun of hope illumined the fairy frost-work with a single, slanting ray - dazzled by the transient brightness, I dreaded the meridian fervors that should dissolve the glittering charm. Yes! it was madness - but it was the pleasurable madness which none but madmen know.

I cannot answer your question - Pain me not by its repetition; neither seek to ensnare me to the disclosure. Unkindly, severely, as I have been treated, I will not risque, even, the possibility of injuring the man, whom I have so tenderly loved, in the esteem of any one. Were I to name him, you know him not; you could not judge of his qualities. He is not "a model of excellence." I perceive it, with pain - and if obliged to retract my judgment on some parts of his character - I retract it with agonizing reluctance! But I could trace the sources of his errors, and candour and self-abasement imperiously compel me to a mild judgment, to stifle the petulant suggestions of a wounded spirit.

Ought not our principles, my friend, to soften the asperity of our censures? - Could I have won him to my arms, I thought I could soften, and even elevate, his mind - a mind, in which I still perceive a great proportion of good. I weep for him, as well as for myself. He will, one day, know my value, and feel my loss. Still, I am sensible, that, by my extravagence, I have given a great deal of vexation (possibly some degradation), to a being, whom I had no right to persecute, or to compel to chuse [sic] happiness through a medium of my creation. I cannot exactly tell the extent of the injury I may have done him. A long train of consequences succeed, even, our most indifferent actions. - Strong energies, though they answer not the end proposed, must yet produce correspondent effects. Morals and mechanics are here analogous. No longer, then, distress me by the repetition of a question I ought not to answer. I am content to be the victim - Oh! may I be the only victim - of my folly!

One more observation allow me to make, before I conclude. That we can "admire, esteem, and love," an individual - (for love in the abstract, loving mankind collectively, conveys to me no idea) - which must be, in fact, depending upon that individual for a large share of our felicity, and not lament his loss, in proportion to our apprehension of his worth, appears to me a proposition, involving in itself an absurdity; therefore demonstrably false.

Let me, my friend, see you ere long - your remonstrance has affected me - save me from myself!

TO THE SAME

[In continuation.]

My letter having been delayed a few days, through a mistake - I resume my pen; for, running my eye over what I had written, I perceive (confounded by the force of your expressions) I have granted you too much. My conduct was not, altogether, so insane as I have been willing to allow. It is certain, that could I have attained the end proposed, my happiness had been encreased. "It is necessary for me to love and admire, or I sink into sadness." The bahaviour of the man, whom I sought to move, appeared to me too inconsistent to be entirely the result of *indifference*. To be roused and stimulated by obstacles - obstacles admitting hope, because obscurely seen - is no mark of weakness. Could I have subdued, what I, *then,* conceived to be the *prejudices* of a worthy man, I could have increased both his happiness and my own. I deeply reasoned, and philosophized, upon the subject. Persevervance, with little ability, has effected wonders; - with perseverance, I felt, that, I had the power of uniting ability - confiding in that power, I was the dupe of my own reason. No other man, perhaps, could have acted the part which this man has acted: - how, then, was I to take such a part into my calculations?

Do not misconceive me - it is no miracle that I did not inspire affection. On this subject, the mortification I have suffered has humbled me, it may be, even, unduly in my own eyes - but to the emotions of my pride, I would disdain to give words. Whatever may have been my feelings, I am too proud to express the rage of slighted love! - Yet, I am sensible to all the powers of those charming lines of Pope -

> "Unequal talk, a passion to resign,
> For hearts so touch'd, so pierc'd, so lost, as mine!
> Ere such a soul regains its peaceful state,
> How often must it love, how often hate;
> How often hope, despair, resent, regret,
> Conceal, disdain, *do all things but forget!*"

But to return. I pursued, comparatively, (as I thought) a certain good; and when, at times, discouraged, I have repeated to myself - What! after all these pains, shall I relinquish my efforts, when, perhaps, on the very verge of success? - To say nothing of the difficulty of forcing an active mind out of its trai I desisted, what was to be the result? The sensations I now feel - apathy, stagnation, abhorred vacuity!

You cannot resist the force of my reasoning - you, who are acquainted with, who know how to paint, in colours true to nature, the human heart - you, who admire, as a proof of power, the destructive courage of an Alexander, even the fanatic fury of a Ravaillac - you, who honour the pernicious ambition of an Augustus Caesar, as bespeaking the potent, energetic, mind! - why should *you* affect to be intolerant to a passion, though differing in nature, generated on the same principles, and by a parallel

process. The capacity of perception, or of receiving sensation, is (or generates) the power; into what channel that power shall be directed, depends not on ourselves. Are we not the creatures of outward impressions? Without such impressions, should we be any thing? Are not passions and powers synonimous - or can the latter be produced without the lively interest that constitutes ther former? Do you dream of annihilating the one - and will not the other be extinguished? With the apostle, Paul, permit me to say - "I am not mad, but speak the words of truth and soberness."

To what purpose did you read my confessions, but to trace in them a character formed, like every other human character, by the result of unavoidable impressions, and the chain of necessary events. I feel, that my arguments are incontrovertible: - I suspect that, by affecting to deny their force, you will endeavour to deceive either me or yourself. - I have acquired the power of reasoning on this subject at a dear rate - at the expence of inconceivable suffering. Attempt not to deny me the miserable, expensive, victory. I am ready to say - (ungrateful that I am) - Why did you put me upon calling forth my strong reason?

I perceive there is no cure for me - (apathy is, not the restoration to health, but, the morbid lethargy of the soul) but by a new train of impressions, of whatever nature, equally forcible with the past. - You will tell me, It remains with myself whether I will predetermine to resist such impressions. Is this true? Is it philosophical? Ask yourself. What! - can *even you* shrink from the consequences of your own principles?

One word more - You accuse me of brooding in silence over my sensations - of considering them as a "sacred deposit." Concealment is particularly repugnant to my disposition - yet a thousand delicacies - a thousand nameless solicitudes, and apprehensions, sealed my lips! He who inspired them was, alone, the depositary of my most secret thoughts! - my heart was unreservedly open before him - I covered my paper with its emotions, and transmitted it to him - like him who whispered his secret into the earth, to relieve the burden of uncommunicated thought. My secret was equally safe, and received in equal silence! Alas! he was not then ignorant of the effects it was likely to produce!

'EMMA.'

Letter 21: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

I write only a line, to say, I feel as if I had done you some injustice - Perhaps, I still think you refine too much - may there not be philosophical romance? Forgive me, these imperious feelings make me sometimes, impertinent, even to my best friends! But your model is too high, my eyes ake to look up to it. No, I do not doubt your sympathy - I cannot doubt your humanity, & words wou'd do injustice to the sense I have of your delicate consideration & benevolent attentions. I may have form'd an erroneous judgement, in many respects, of the characters both of you & your friend,[2] however that may be, I wish not to extend my confidence - & tho', at once, too humble & too proud, I am satisfied, nor repent the trust reposed in you! Yet - yet, will you allow me to say, that I conceive there is this difference in our situations, which necessarily makes us see objects through a somewhat different medium - The ruling propensity of your mind, I conceive, has been gratified - mine torn away, destroyed, rudely destroyed, with an accumulation of aggravating circumstances - Hence, I view every object thro' a jaundiced, distorted - Ah! need I go on, to say - that the whole world appears to me a wilderness of devouring beasts of prey - society, a sickly mass of calamity & corruption - I feel every moment in danger of resigning my virtue or my benevolence - I want the sunshine of the mind, that spreads it illumination on the surrounding objects. No one can exactly enter into the sensations of another - for even we ourselves, at different periods of time, look back astonish'd at the tumult which has subsided -

"The calm sea wonders at the wreck it made."

I suspect that all mankind are pursueing phantoms however dignified by different appellations.

I shall recover, of this I make no doubt, if I live long enough for the usual, healing operations of time - but in the meanwhile, the ardor of youth is passing - I wake out of a deleterious dream, to find myself a comfortless, solitary, shivering, wanderer, in the dreary wilderness of human society.

I cannot love mankind collectively - they are a mere abstraction to me - why shou'd I love them? - they do not make me, nor can I make them, happy. But I cou'd have encreas'd the felicity & improvement of a small circle of individuals - & this circle, spreading wider & wider, wou'd have operated towards the grand end, general utility.[3] Every person is not intended for a hero, neither wou'd this be necessary! The only true morality is that which tends to encrease the bulk of felicity - my plan had this tendency, I am put out, & now perhaps shall do mischief - The placid stream, turn'd out of its channel, lays waste the

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1 10 January 1796 is written on the letter but is clearly postmarked 9 February to Mr Godwin 25 Chalton Street.

2 Holcroft.

3 One of *Political Justice*'s radical principles was the promotion of 'absolute utility' for the 'good of the whole'. See for example, I, pp. 363-64.

meadows.[4] The man I too tenderly loved, appears to me at this moment a great criminal, on my principles of morality - He wou'd not receive & confer happiness - such an opportunity may never present itself to him again - He is degrading himself - he will sink yet lower, he has laid waste my mind, & he has, or I much mistake, given a mortal stab to his own.[5]

But I weary you - I feel again proud & presumptuous - not a word on these subjects did I mean to say - I took up my pen with a diffent intention - Not to speak of gratitude, since you quarrel with the term, but reason & justice compel me to reassure you of my respect & esteem! Shou'd I promise to be, in future, more worthy of your friendship, more rational, I shou'd, perhaps, deceive myself & you, but I repeat, what I have often said, I will do what I can! I request the continuance of your patience & candor! Ever call upon me, without hesitation, for ingennuousness in all that concerns only, myself, this is a quality on which I value myself - It affords, in my opinion, at least a basis for virtue. I will not, then, deceive you, I will not try to appear better than I am - you may pity my weakness, but you shall not despise my hypocrisy.

I have finish'd your friends play,[6] it contains many excellent sentiments: your commendation of the character of Hair-brain appears, to me, to be just, it is not more comic than pathetic - it inclined me both to laugh & cry. I wish Olivia's conduct (not motives) had appear'd less equivocal. Poets & dramatists know how to reward their heroes - is it so in real life? - you say yes! - My heart, alas! pertinaciously, answers No! It wou'd be unreasonable to expect you often to listen to wayward & monotonous complaints - yet, your conversation takes me out of myself - & I give you no new information, when I tell you how selfish I am! The last sentence has a paradoxical appearance, but it shall go. I meant but to have written a line, & have fill'd my paper - Tell me frankly when I weary you, either by letter otherwise - But I shall judge by your conduct, for you have the remedy in your own hands.

Adieu, my friend - MH.

Tuesday morn^{g} - Jan^{ry} 10th - 1796.

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4 See Helvetius on the destructive nature of thwarted passions, chapter 3 of this study, and *Memoirs* II, p. 52.

5 Frend's rejection of the means to happiness was Hays's main 'radical' interpretation of the relationship. Although the pursuit and production of happiness was essential within 'jacobin' thinking, it was even more central to Hays who, like Wollstonecraft, perceived women's contribution to 'general good' to be bounded by the traditional roles of wifely support and motherhood. Significantly, there is a distinction in fiction when Emma Courtney accuses herself, in that, Augustus 'had made me almost a criminal in my own eyes' (II, p. 91).

6 Holcroft's *The Man of Ten Thousand, A Comedy*, was performed at Drury Lane, 23 January, 1796. According to William Hazlitt, Olivia 'is the blemish of the piece. Her notions of virtue are too fastidious by half, and she exacts conformity to her standard of perfection, with a dogmatical severity, which would scarcely sit well on a Stoic' (II, pp. 211-12).

Letter 22: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

Sunday evening.

How is it, my friend, that after so many conversations & so many letters, we do not seem thoroughly to comprehend each other? Permit me to state to you, in a few words, the sum of my notions of philosophy & morals, & then to draw the inference from them, which, I conceive, apply to my own case! Ever talking of myself, will you not be wearied of this exhaustless theme? When you are, be sincere, & I will change my topic, or be silent: but my mind has lately been so strongly agitated, that a never ending succession of ideas pour in upon it & struggle for utterance: or else, which is most probable, I repeat the same sentiment again & again, varying only in a slight degree its form & mode of expression.

The system which I adopt recommends itself to me by its simplicity, it is properly a science, because every proposition into which it branches may be resolved into one original principle - the desire of pleasure, or the abhorrence of pain.[2] Nature designed her children to be happy, morality, then, is not from heaven, but for earth; it consists in reciprocal duties, in promoting, to the utmost of our power, individual felicity, of which general is constituted - felicity, the only true end of existence! - All notions of morals which do not tend to this are spurious. I grieve, that, in the present distemper'd state of civilization, a perpetual clashing of interests cuts up by the roots all the sympathies of life, converts man into a beast of prey & the world into a wilderness, & renders this rule, so clear, so simple in itself, difficult to practise. Men do right when pursuing interest & happiness, it argues no depravity (this is the fable of superstition) it is the force of nature. - My heart yearns to believe, that the period will arrive, when my head is laid in the dust, that this great truth, clearly understood, will new model society, &, with but rare exceptions, will render the pursuit of individual, comparible with that of general, welfare. So far, I trust, you will agree with me, but now for my inferences!

You call upon me to be happy, the advice is benevolent, I wish to embrace it, & I ask you to point out the means? Is it glory you wish to propose to me? I grant it is a dazzling object but my weak sight shrinks from its rays, A few human beings, only, in the present state of things, are form'd to take their place among this high order of beings, so peculiar is the combination of circumstances necessary to produce these superior minds! I feel my powers inadequate to the effort, a high rank in the temple of fame I have no prospect of attaining, a lower one does not sufficiently stimulate my ambition to make it a primary pursuit, we never vigorously pursue an object conceived to be absolutely out of our reach. The happiness I sought tho' certainly of an inferior nature, was adapted to that disposition which every event of my life, the education both of design & accident, had

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1 Parts of this are included in *Memoirs*, II, pp. 49-55. See Letter 22A.

2 This and the rest of the paragraph is Hays's interpretation of Helvetian thinking. See *A Treatise on Man*, I, pp. 281-83, and *De l'Esprit*, pp. 115-122.

fitted me for. Twice I believed it almost within my grasp, & twice it was snatched from me, with an accumulation of aggravating circumstances.[3] Having, then, never realized my plans, having never had an experience of their fallacy, imagination, of course, had her full play, & brought forward, as usual, all the glowing colours, throwing the shades into the background. You tell me, & other wise men have said the same, that there are disappointments in, as well as of, attainment. Be it so, the last I have experienced & am smarting under, the first, having never experienced, I do not clearly conceive: how then, do you expect to overcome the vivid, by the fainter, impression? My situation is now, that of destitution - I stand as on a wide plain, bounded on all sides by the horizon: none of the objects, which I see within these limits, can fix my attention - some are so lofty, my eyes ake to look up to them, others so low, I disdain to stoop for them. What then am I to do ? I want a substitute, for the mind must have an object, but where am I to gain it? I have sought for happiness in love, it is an illusion, say you, perhaps so, but I have only your word for it, I have of this no experience! - But suppose me convinc'd, for what am I to change it? I have already given you my sentiment of glory, philanthropy, the love of all mankind, is implied in them, I wish them well, with all my heart, (but the object is too vast, has too much magnitude, for my grasp) I can do little for them, they still less for me - where then is the sympathy which binds me to them? No, mankind, collectively, are an abstraction to me, which floats in my understanding, but reaches not my heart! You, we will say, are a philosopher, a man of first-rate talents, your writings will live to posterity, & the anticipation of this will console you for present persecution & injustice, shou'd you be call'd to encounter them. I am a woman, I mean by this, that education has given me a sexual character.[4] - It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my sex, I am not a mere fine lady, a domestic drudge, or a doll of fashion. I can think, write, reason, converse with men & scholars, & despise many petty, femenine prejudices. But I have not the talents for a legislator or a reformer of the world, I have still many shrinking delicacies & female foibles, that unfit me for rising to arduous heights. With these convictions, I repeat, glory, with me, will never be a primary object - the same arguments may be applied to the pursuit of every species of ambition, & to seek wealth I am still more unfitted. Where, then, shall I find this object to call forth my exertions, & preserve me from langour & apathy? Shall I love again, & subject myself to a third disappointment?,[5] this wou'd be hazardous & might be fatal. I am not now girlish young, nor beautiful - Men, I suspect, are influenced only by their senses, the love I feel, & wou'd inspire, they are incapable of - This, then, you wou'd hardly advise! - Beside, like R's Julia, strong, individual, attachment, annihilated, in my eyes, every man in the

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3 Hays is referring to her potential marriages to Eccles and Frend.

4 See *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp, 193-95.

5 Hays is thought to have begun a relationship with Charles Lloyd in 1797. See chapter one of this study.

creation[6] - for him I loved (while I loved him) was something more, all the rest, something less. Are then his qualities so high & peerless-? you ask - I answer, & grieve while I answer, No! - But, in the commencement of my attachment, I took many things for granted, & judged thro' other eyes than my own - Nor did I discover, that I had made any mistakes till association & habit had made my affection disinterested.[7]

We will now suppose, that generated by a similar process, you love glory disinterestedly, I, a frail, erring being. - You exult, & with reason, in the superiority of your choice - & I blush - but still I sigh! By exchanging our objects, you wou'd be a loser & I a gainer - Be it so! But the change wou'd, perhaps, be, to both, equally impracticable. My pursuit, being ardent, has call'd forth energies & talents suitable to it - yours has done the same. They are streams, rising from the same fountain, but parting at their source & winding different ways - Yours, makes its way up the steep ascent, mixes with the mountain torrents, swells into a rapid river, & pours its accumulated waters into the boundless ocean. Mine, glided gently thro' flowry meadows & wou'd have fertilised their banks, but a rough blast swept over its channel, drying its scanty rills, scorching suns drew from it exhalations, thorns & brambles were thrown into it, impeding & choking its course, while its exhausted remains settle in a stagnated pool.

I am serious, when the present fermentation of my mind subsides, this is emblematical of the fate which awaits me - nor can I, at present, see the means to avert it.

Again, you advise, various, rational, pursuit - this is vague, you must state particulars - I read, I write, I converse, I walk - but all this is insipid without an end to which to refer it. To what purpose am I improving myself? I can do little towards mending the world, & for that little shall probably meet with reproach & malignity, instead of respect & esteem. (This had already been the case with a beloved friend of mine,[8] women labour under peculiar & appropriate disadvantages.) I have no children in whom to live again, in whom to perpetuate my virtues & acquirements - I shall never experience those sweet sensations of which my heart is form'd so susceptible! I may be esteem'd, you say - It is a cold word - I want to be beloved - my ardent & exquisite sensibilities hourly prey on myself! Friendship I grant, has its balms, it is my principle consolation - but the more I see of life, the more does distrust mingle its alloy even with [the] cordial - No common interest unites me with my friends - [already] I have made gross mistakes, my judgement has been but too fallible, & my confidence in humanity begins to totter!

I repeat, incessantly, whence came I, whither am I going, & to what does all this tend?

Mary Hays

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6 Hays is referring to Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* which she would probably have known as *Eloisa: or, a series of Original Letters*, 2nd edn, 4 vols, (London: Griffiths, Becket and De Hondt, 1761).

7 Hays is engaging with Godwin's own theory of 'disinterest'. See note 6, Letter 22.

8 Mary Wollstonecraft who was recovering from the ending of her relationship with Imlay, and who had already recommenced her acquaintance with Godwin in January.

Saturday morn. It is a week since the preceding was written & laid by - it was intended for you, therefore you shall have it. I had hoped to have seen you before this time, but you do not think a mind so sunk in absurdity worth reclaiming, & you are right! I am sinking fast into the state described by Rousseau - of a being, burthensome to itself & useless to others. I thank you for the benevolent efforts you have already made - but I repent of the confidence I have reposed in you - I repent of the ingenuousness of every part of my past conduct. Sincerity is a fine theory - I have tried it, but find it impracticable - I am its victim!

For those who would avoid contumely & misery, be politic, fair & open proceedings render them no match for mankind - let them veil their hearts in impenetrable [ ] - This is the dictate of experience!

I am soul - sick! I am not yet sufficiently humbled. The next time you visit me tell me of all my faults - my proud heart swells with a consciousness of worth - assist me in a severe self-examination. Is it true that - the late transations of my life - transactions remember'd with loathing & abhorrence - I only have been the agressor? You are a cool looker on - your passions have not been engaged, you therefore are competent, to resolve this question - & you will resolve it with truth. My mind is no longer the residence of mild & gentle affections - it is agitated by a whirlwind of haughty & contrasting emotions - I would not live always, Life is a tragic farce! Adieu, my friend, MH.

Letter 22A[1]

I reflected, meditated, reasoned, with myself - 'That one channel, into which my thoughts were incessantly impelled, was destructive of all order, of all connection.' New projects occurred to me, which I had never before ventured to encourage - I revolved them in my mind, examined them in every point of view, weighed their advantages and disadvantages, in a moral, in a prudential, scale. - Threatening evils appeared on all sides - I endeavoured, at once, to free my mind from prejudice, and from passion; and, in the critical and *singular* circumstances in which I had placed myself, coolly to survey the several arguments of the case, and nicely to calculate their force and importance.

'If, as we are taught to believe, the benevolent Author of nature be, indeed, benevolent,' said I, to myself, 'he surely must have intended the *happiness* of his creatures. Our morality cannot extend to him, but must consist in the knowledge, and practice, of those duties which we owe to ourselves and to each other. - Individual happiness constitutes the general good: - *happiness* is the only true *end* of existence; - all notions of morals, founded on any other principle, involve in themselves a contradiction, and must be erroneous. Man does right, when pursuing interest and pleasure - it argues no depravity - this is the fable of superstition: he ought to only be careful, that, in seeking his own good, he does not render it incompatible with the good of others - that he does not consider himself as standing alone in the universe. The infraction of established *rules* may, it is possible, in some cases, be productive of mischief; yet, it is difficult to state any *rule* so precise and determinate, as to be alike applicable to every situation: what, in one instance, might be a *vice*, in another may possibly become a *virtue*: - a thousand imperceptible, evanescent, shadings, modify every thought, every motive, every action, of our lives - no one can estimate the sensations of, can form an exact judgment for, another.

'I have sometimes suspected, that all mankind are pursuing phantoms, however dignified by different appellations. - The healing operations of time, had I patience to wait the experiment, might, perhaps, recover my mind from its present distempered state; but, in the meanwhile, the bloom of youth is fading, and the vigour of life running to waste. - Should I, at length, awake from a delusive vision, it would be only to find myself a comfortless, solitary, shivering, wanderer, in the dreary wilderness of human society. I feel in myself the capacities for increasing the happiness, and the improvement, of a few individuals - and this circle, spreading wider and wider, would operate towards the grand end of life - *general utility*.'

Again I repeated to myself - 'Ascetic virtues are equally barbarous as vain: - the only just morals, are those which have a tendency to increase the bulk of enjoyment. My plan tends to this. The good which I seek does not appear to me to involve injury to any one -

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1 *Memoirs*. II, pp. 49-55.

it is of a nature, adapted to the disposition of my mind, for which every event of my life, the education both of design and accident, have fitted me. If I am now put out, I may, perhaps, do mischief: - the placid stream, forced from its channel, lays waste the meadow. I seem to stand as upon a wide plain, bounded on all sides by the horizon: - among the objects which I perceive within these limits, some are so lofty, my eyes ache to look up to them; others so low, I disdain to stoop for them. *One,* only, seems fitted to my powers, and to my wishes - *one, alone,* engages my attention! Is not its possession worthy an arduous effort: *Perseverance* can turn the course of rivers, and level mountains! Shall I, then, relinquish my efforts, when, perhaps, on the very verge of success?

'The mind must have an object: - should I desist from my present pursuit, after all it has cost me, for what can I change it? I feel, that I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine - but a *woman, to whom education has given a sexual character.* It is true, I have risen superior to the generality of my *oppressed sex*; yet, I have neither the talents for a legislator, nor for a reformer, of the world. I have still many female foibles, and shrinking delicacies, that unfit me for rising to arduous heights. Ambition cannot stimulate me, and to accumulate wealth, I am still less fitted. Should I, then, do violence to my heart, and compel it to resign its hopes and expectations, what can preserve me from sinking into, the most abhorred of all states, *languor and inanity*? - Alas! that tender and faithful heart refuses to change its object - it can never love another. Like Rousseau's Julia, my strong individual attachment has annihilated every man in the creation: - him I love appears, in my eyes, something more - every other, something less.

I have laboured to improve myself, that I might be worthy of the situation I have chosen. I would unite myself to a man of worth - I would have our mingled virtues and talents perpetuated in our offspring - I would experience those sweet sensations, of which nature has formed my heart so exquisitely susceptible. My ardent sensibilities incite me to love - to seek to inspire sympathy - to be beloved! My heart obstinately refuses to renounce the man, to whose mind my own seems akin! From the centre of private affections, it will at length embrace - like spreading circles on the peaceful bosom of the smooth and expanded lake - the whole sensitive and rational creation. Is it virtue, then, to combat, or to yield to, my passions?'

I considered, and reconsidered, these reasonings, so specious, so flattering, to which passion lent its force. One moment, my mind seemed firmly made up on the part I had to act; - I persuaded myself, that I had gone too far to recede, and that there remained for me no alternative: - the next instant, I shrunk, gasping, from my own resolves, and shuddered at the important consequences which they involved. Amidst a variety of perturbations, of conflicting emotions, I, at length, once more, took up my pen.

Letter 23: HAYS TO GODWIN

March 1st 1796

Give me leave to say, the distress that can be laughed away is no distress at all, this is a sad perversion of terms, unless it be - "the moody madness, laughing wild, amid severest woe."[1] You & your friend appear to me to be attempting to revive, tho' under a different modification, the old stoic doctrine, a doctrine (forgive me) originating in pride, & outraging nature. - You also treat with too unqualified a contempt those sorrows which you, perhaps, have neither suffer'd nor are exposed to suffer; I am more than ever convinc'd, that true sympathy is only to be generated by similar feelings; Mrs Inchbald says something of this, respecting the commiseration of the younger Henry for Hannah, & she is right.[2] I suspect, likewise, that you do not treat fairly either Mrs Woolstonecraft's disappointments or my own, you select, merely, the object, calculate its worth abstractedly, & say it is not deserving a regret, this is a point I will name, but you shou'd take into consideration all the associations, habits, & plans, connected with this object. - "Love (says Mrs Inchbald, truly) is joined with numerous other sentiments, it is but a poor dependant, a retainer upon other passions - divest the boasted sensation of these & it is no more than the impression of a twelvemonth"[3] - or, I believe, still more transient. With women, the connection of this affection with other sentiments is still more wide & complicated than with men, generally speaking, their establishment, all their importance in society, yes, their very social existence, is close-twisted with it, it is then necessarily made, with them, a primary pursuit, their whole education has this tendency, & unless you cou'd make them wholly independent of circumstances, you cannot cure the effects which these trains of thinking & acting produce. Place then, <u>for a moment</u> the object out of the question, still I tell you, I am unhappy because "my occupation's gone", & when the associations I have so fondly cherished are rudely torn away, I sink into apathy, because I lose everything that endears life. I abhor indifference, it is the canker of the soul - it is to me synonimous with sadness, with death - the death of the mind - my struggles to free myself, then, will hardly be sincere, while I prefer the inquietudes, even, of unrequited tenderness, to the want of an object, on which to pour that fund of affection that glows within my bosom. Such is the constitution of my mind, & surely its affections, even on your own principles, have become most sublimely disinterested, while thus cherished, though producing an overbalance of misery. You tell me, a road is open where I may pursue happiness in a different direction, place then the happiness, where I may distinctly

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1 Thomas Gray, 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College', 1742. Also quoted in Letter 20.

2 *Nature and Art*, 2 vols (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1796).

3 Hannah Primrose 'experienced the sentiment [of love] before she ever heard it named in that sense in which she felt it - and she felt it as a genuine love alone exists - joined with numerous other sentiments: for love, however rated by many, as the chief passion of the human heart, is but a poor dependant, a retainer upon other passions: admiration, gratitude, respect, esteem, pride in the object - divest the boasted sensation of these, and it is no more than the impression of a twelve-month, by courtesy, or vulgar error, termed love' (I, pp. 141-42).

apprehend it, at the end of this road, or tho' I may have the power, I shall never feel the will to enter on a dreary barren path.

You thought me unjust, when I said in my last letter, that I repented of the confidence I had reposed in you, be assured, I meant not to imply any distrust either of your delicacy or humanity, of which I have experienc'd repeated proofs, but it was a humiliating recital - I am proud, & I felt your pity too nearly allied to contempt, it seem'd to me, that those feelings & affections appear'd to you ridiculous which, in my idea, make up the whole value of life - for when I have nothing to love, then may I cease to exist. I fancied also, that I had sunk in your esteem, I shrunk from the notion of being regarded only on a mathematical calculation of my merits, if I cou'd not awaken sympathy, I despair'd of enforcing such high claims, - I had for some time past rested on your friendship as one of my sincerest & most unmixed consolations - I was jealous of the little progress I had made, & my confidence was shaken, for I cannot consider <u>any</u> attachments of a purely abstract nature. I was pleas'd with the answer of Henry to Rebekka (in nature & art) when she had falsely traduced both him & herself - "Can you forgive me", she asks - "<u>I love you</u> (he replied) & in that is comprehended everything that is kind."[4] This, I confess, is the nature of the affections which I have experienced, & my heart has been pierced, because my tenderness was contemn'd. I fear you have, lately, thought me a little petulant, my temper was originally impetuous, & I find it is not yet effectually subdued, beside you treated me a little severely, you called me names & ridiculed me, & my mind is, at present, in a sickly state. But I do not mean to be impertinent, were I capable of being so, <u>knowingly</u>, I shou'd consider myself as unjust & unpardonable. I highly respect & esteem you, your conversation always interests, & takes me out of myself, but some of your principles, while they contradict my experience, I cannot adopt. I may be erroneous, but I am unprejudiced, I mean, that my opinions are the result of investigation, I have given up the notions of the nurse & the priest: had I been any man's disciple, it would most probably have been yours, if the system of Helvetius comes with greater conviction to my mind, it is because it coincides with my experience, & on what other foundation can I rest? No! however erroneous, I cherish no known partialities, if this be the case, & yet it be true, that I <u>really</u> do not comprehend you, a presumption is form'd against your principles. Two thirds of the world, I do not imagine, have greater discernment, docility, & attention, than myself: then, can those truths be very obvious, which two thirds of the world are not likely to comprehend. Truth, ought to be clear & simple, light as a sunbeam - A mind of common powers cannot go thro' Euclid, & be at a loss to discover the properties of a triangle, but you, according to your own account, have labour'd, to little purpose, to present to my mind, principles, which I am yet, eagar to imbibe, because you

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4 *Nature and Art*, II, p. 32. The original reads:
"And can you forgive me?
"I can love you; and in that is comprised every thing that is kind."

tell me their consequences will be happiness. When I speak of happiness, you will again call me selfish, I do not deny it, this is the principle in which our efforts must originate, yes, the happiness of the actor, but from this principle I can trace my fabric to a heigth equally sublime with yours. Why, then, you have said, for ever revert to its origin? - Because I think it necessary to understand & set in motion, the moving spring of my machine, before I calculate its forces. After all, I do not believe we greatly differ, only, that in some of the consequences which you deduce, I think you mysticise a little. Bear with me, while I once more go over the principles stated in my last letter, which you so unmercifully criticized, or rather satirized. - Yet, believe me, I was not offended at your severity, on the contrary, I wish you consider'd it worth your while to examine with equal strictness all I write, it has a tendency to produce many good effects, it awakens my attention, this in itself (particularly at present) is a good, it wou'd accustom me to habits of greater precision, of deeper thinking, & of closer reasoning, if it mortifies, it, at the same time, gratifies, my pride - If you did not think I had a mind of some promise, you wou'd not fatigue yourself with useless pains. My acquaintance with you has I am convinced improved, because it has exercised, my understanding. Never, then, spare me, & I trust you will allow of my freedom in return! Two predominant passions form'd my character, one the desire of intellectual advancement, the other of exercising the gentler affections, the latter, thro' adverse circumstances, has been turn'd into bitterness, the former only remains - it was, I confess, the subordinate propensity, but it must be my resource. - Habit, has render'd them both disinterested, for, more than ever entangled & bewilder'd, I have in either no distinct <u>end</u> in view.[5] My principles are afloat, uncertain every step I take, I know not what is likely to produce good, or what evil.

But to return to my philosophy, which I will endeavour more perspicuously to state. As you objected to the metaphorical expression - 'That nature designed the happiness of her children' - I will say, that it appears to me - that the planet, or globe, which we inhabit, is capable of producing materials to afford proper sustenance & enjoyment to the beings, or animals, which exist on it. That, the capacity of receiving sensation (synonimous with the desire of pleasure, or the abhorrence of pain) is the generating principle of every power, whether physical or moral (if you allow of the distinction). Happiness, then, is the <u>end</u> we all seek, the moving spring of every action (however unconscious to ourselves) - the happiness of the actor - Consequently, in the first stages of society every thing wou'd be decided by brute force, till, at length, man finding himself a gregarious animal, & that his highest & proper enjoyments are not of a solitary nature, cannot be secured but by social agreement, establishes, either directly, or indirectly, social conventions, or relinquishes the lesser, to secure the greater, good. Those are, consequently, the truest morals which ensure to every individual, which makes up the

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5 See *Political Justice*, 2nd edn. I. pp. 422-38, where Godwin discusses the opposition between self-love and benevolence.

whole, the largest share of this good, or pleasure, the only valuable end of existence, for it is better not to be, than not to enjoy.[6] I distinguish then rational, from theological morality - The former is the knowledge of what is oweing to ourselves & others, the latter, a wild notion of pleasing a spiritual, inconceivable, being by whimsical & useless sacrifices. Men, I contend, are not depraved when pursuing their own interest - it is the law of nature, in this everything commences, & the self-oblivion you speak of, is merely the habit produced, at length, by the mechanical operations of the mind - It must not be proposed as an antecedent, it has in it nothing of the nature of motive, but will invariably follow as a consequent.[7] Every human being (every animal) in a course of time acts disinterestedly, whether it be virtuous or vicious - It is merely, & necessarily, a course of fix'd habits, from a reiteration of principles & actions, of which, when, arrived at a certain distance from the spring which set them in motion, the intermediate ideas are forgotten. These appear to me simple, yet important truths, & the only truths which can new model society. In vain you will exhort mankind to self-oblivion till you have first convinced them, that duties & pleasures are comparable, great exertions can only be produced by strong motives, you must begin by making it our interest to be virtuous, before virtue can become disinterested,[8] & it is as necessary to revert to these first principles, in our efforts to reform others, as to make the learner in geometry understand the nature of a right angle before you can demonstrate to him the 32 problem in Euclid, that the 3 internal angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. If I have used repetition, it is, that I am anxious not to be misconstrued. I know not how to express myself with more perspicuity, nor am I conscious of any change having taken place in my ideas (tho' I do not allow myself to be more selfish than my neighbours) I call upon you, then, once more to point out the defects of my resoning. I am at present suffering from the effects of my disinterestedness, if I had not foster'd a disinterested affection, half the severe returns I met with, wou'd long since have cured me - Your Falklands love of honor, Caleb Wms curiosity were, from habit (& they are just, if not common, pictures) equally disinterested - It is true, the pursuits were all erroneous, but not on that account, the more selfish - Vice, generated by a similar process, is as disinterested as virtue, & error as truth. Selfishness exists only in the outset of any pursuit, & it is the moving spring of all. Mistake is the only mischief against which

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6 Compare *Monthly Magazine*, 3 (1797), pp. 26-28, 'Defence of Helvetius'.

7 The 2nd edition of *Political Justice* I, p. 432, claims that 'we are capable of self-oblivion, as well as of sacrifice'.

8 Hays is expressing conflict here between Helvetius':

> The virtuous man is not then he who sacrifices his pleasures, habits, and strongest passions to the public welfare, since it is impossible that such a man should exist; but he whose strongest passion is so conformable to the general interest, that he is almost constantly necessitated to be virtuous (*De l'Esprit*, p. 188)

and Godwin's:

> the legislator, is bound to recollect that the perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness. [...] Above all he should be careful not to add to the vigour of the selfish passions. He should gradually wean men from contemplating their own benefit in all that they do, and induce them to view with complacency the advantage that is to result to others. (*Political Justice*, I, p. 360)

we ought to guard mankind, modify them by equal laws, or what is still better, enlighten their judgement, & you may permit them to retain their self-love, & erect on this foundation the sublimest fabric. If I have expressed myself too decisively, it is because my convictions are strong, they flash upon my mind with a light that I cannot resist, & their consequences [ ] to me to follow, in an unbroken chain. Yet, I held them not as prejudices & am prepared to attend all that may invalidate them.

I am melancholy, because, I conceive, I am out of the sphere in which I cou'd be most useful, cou'd the most receive, & reflect, happiness, because my, views, my plans, my purposes, are broken of, & I have no distinct apprehension of any other situation, or course of action, that cou'd be equally productive either of enjoyment or utility, & till I am awakend to a sufficiently interesting pursuit (of which at present there is little prospect) I shall continue to languish. My plans did not, from their nature, involve misery, the event was totally independent of the principles, & might have been reversed. I shall write, to get rid of vacuity, without having any certain end in view, for I am doubtful whether I may do good or mischief. I think still, as I did when I perused your work, that you do not sufficiently consider the mix'd nature of man, he will never, I doubt, be refined into pure intellect. I confess I do not comprehend you, for, sometimes, I think you almost platonize, at others profess what appears to me a laxity of principle, or else we affix to terms very different ideas - When you speak of 'dissoluteness being a virtue', you convey to me no idea.[9] I do not affect to be insensible to the sensations of nature, but, in proportion, as my mind has been advanced, they have become exalted & purified. Here sensuality, without the charm of delicacy, where the mind has no part, appears to me brutality, yes, degrading brutality, & inspires me only with disgust. Another subject I will just touch upon - Justice is in my opinion, the summary of virtue, I shou'd suffer a considerable degree of uneasiness under the apprehension of having acted towards, or charged, another unjustly, & should not rest till I had made restitution, or acknowledgement, this I intimated to you, on a certain subject, & you treated it lightly.

Upon the whole, I never felt more unpleasantly after conversing with you, than on Monday seven-night. Do let me see you before it is long, & let us try if we cannot comprehend each other better?

I shall have in a short time a quire of paper ready for your inspection. I am not satisfied with it myself, nor do I expect that you will - You are very good to take so much trouble with me. Were you sincere, when you told me, you thought the interval of my

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9 Compare *Political Justice*, sections on 'Cohabitation and Marriage':

> But it may happen that other men will feel for her the same preference as I do." This will create no difficulty. We may all enjoy her conversation; and we shall all be wise enough to consider the sensual intercourse as a very trivial object. This, like every other affair in which two persons are concerned, must be regulated in each successive instance by the unforced consent of either party. It is a mark of the extreme depravity of our present habits, that we are inclined to suppose the sensual intercourse any wise material to the advantages arising from the purest affection (II, pp. 848-52 (p. 851)).

writing to you long? I shou'd have conceived such a complaint (I am at a loss for a word) as a very high compt, for I am always afraid of wearying you either by pertinacity or [repetition]. My sensations are too acute - this is not a state of society in which to foster excessive sensibility - Let your friend beware how he cherishes this disposition in his daughter,[10] it will produce to her, or I am much mistaken, an overbalance of misery - misery that cannot be laugh'd away. - I perceive in the countenance of Mr H, himself, strong traces of the ravages of passion. Everybody have their feelings & their vexations, I believe, tho' everybody are not equally candid with myself.

Farewell, my friend, may the tranquility you at present experience never fail, & may you live, & retain your admirable faculties, beyond the age of man. Mary Hays

10 Probably Fanny with whom Hays was acquainted. See Letter 24. Apparently Holcroft referred to his daughters' excessive response to an accident to himself: "Your violent grief, my dear girls, instead of good, does harm. Be collected, and act like rational beings." See Hazlitt, III, pp. 162-63.

Letter 24: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

Wednesday morng - March 8th 96

Now, you have given me an agreeable subject, upon which, having so long harrassed you with painful ones, I must expatiate a little. - But let me premise, that I dwell on it, not because I flatter myself with its being very important to you, but because it is pleasant to myself - You guess I wou'd speak of the respect & esteem with which you have inspired me. My heart is so constituted, that sensations of asperity & resentment, what ever may have been the provocation, are not more painful than transient, but acts of kindness it treasures up never to be effaced or forgotten - And from you, I have received nothing but acts of kindness, & I shou'd abhor myself, as most unjust & capricious, if I did not feel, & acknowledge, all their value! Yes, I repeat, your friendship is one of my greatest & most unmixed, consolations, & the idea, now, of being considered unworthy of it, wou'd sensibly afflict me. The very opposition you have lately given to me, I consider as a new act of kindness, because I am convinced it was intended for my benefit: & tho', I believe, on some subjects, from the different circumstances which have formed our characters, we shou'd never entirely agree, yet I own myself culpable, if I have spoken with petulance, & I trust in your humanity, that you will make allowances for the late trying state of my mind - The struggle has been severe, it involved a number of complicated emotions, but, tho' certainly very far from happy, I am better than I have been. I am concerned at the observations of your friend, & shall take care, when I have an opportunity, to efface the impression from his mind. - Do you remember the letter of mine which you once shew'd to him - dare I suspect, though probably unconscious of it himself - I will say no more!

I think, I understood the distinctions you endeavour'd to convey to my mind, when I last conversed with you, but, still, I do not entirely allow their force, but am inclined to believe, that as the understanding improves, & we extend our views, that, in our general conduct, we substitute happiness as a plan, an aggregate of agreeable sensations, for those of the moment, & that the highest degree of virtue, is the pursuit of rational enjoyment, that enjoyment, which comprehends the greatest variety of relations embracing the welfare of our fellow citizens & fellow beings - its disinterestedness will come of course, so that, in tracing the various branches, we shall often, & sometimes altogether, lose sight of the root. This, at least, at present, appears to me sufficient for all the purposes of morals, sufficient to procure pleasure, the greatest good, for the individual & for the whole. You may perceive how I combat for my system,[2] but shou'd you drive me out of all my strong intrenchments, I hope you will, at last, grant me the honors of war?

I am solicitous for your opinion of my papers, that I may calculate my chances of success. The time you spare from your numerous avocations for the perusal of my

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1 Parts included in *Love-Letters*, pp. 233-35.

2 Her 'system' insists on the comparability of 'individual' with 'general' pursuit of happiness. See previous letter.

scribbles I feel as a real obligation, & yet, you suspected that I esteemed you less. No, your friendship is my pleasure & my boast, & if you do not tell me, you are convinced of my sincerity, I shall be afraid of being proud & saucy again. This is a letter, I believe, without a complaint, I must not end it so, or you will suspect, that somebody has assumed my signature & imitated my writing. I will confess then, that I am not sufficiently disinterested as to expect to be happy. I want a certain number of agreeable sensations for which nature has constituted me - I want, perhaps, a greater number of social & civil advantages, which my education, & the society in which I have mix'd, have taught me to consider as valuable. I look back on the past with a variety of painful ideas & recollections, & I look forward, at present, with joyless indifference.

I believe there is one circumstance which I have not yet mentioned to you, & I am determined by my ingenuousness (if I have no other virtue) to give myself a claim upon your esteem. I early one morng, in last week, accompanied by a friend[3] (to whom a full explanation of my motives & conduct was unnecessary) call'd on the man who had been the subject of my confessions.[4] I made my friend announce, & precede, me to his apartment, & notwithstanding this precaution, which I conceived delicacy required, my entrance most completely disconcerted him (I had never from motives, easy to be conceived, visited him before) - 'I am come (said I, smiling) to call upon you for the exercise of less than a Christian duty, the forgiveness, not of an enemy but, of a friend - I have, no doubt, been guilty of errors, who is free?' - I held out my h& - He took it, & replied to me, with a degree of cordiality. The past was no farther alluded to. - I ask'd him, if he wou'd, with our friend present, come & drink tea with me, to this he assented without hesitation. A few days since, they fulfilled their engagement, two other friends were also of the party. Whether he will ever think proper to call on me again, I know not, but as I conceived, I had not been faultless, & as it is particularly painful to me to cherish severe feelings, where I have heretofore felt affection, I do not repent of what I have done, but feel myself relieved by it. I likewise, since this, see the whole affair with a cooler eye, & observe it in more points of view, than I had before done - absence magnified objects[5] - my hopes have, now, entirely ceased, & with them, some illusions appear to be losing their force - my mind seems regaining a firmer tone - it is no longer convulsed with uncertainty. I promise nothing, I am aware of the danger of relapses, but my situation is certainly changed, from the removal of suspense - I perceive this, & I am calmer - I do not deceive you, unless I deceive myself. It is no bad method of examining our motives & actions, to try how far we dare reveal them to a judicious & benevolent friend - I have, hitherto stood this test, when it fails, I shall sink in my own esteem.

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3 Presumably Wollstonecraft.

4 William Frend.

5 See *De l'Esprit*, p. 8: 'Passions lead us to error because they fix our attention on that particular part of the object they present to us, not allowing us to view it on every side.'

I shou'd like to meet you some day at Mr Holcroft's when there is not too much company, Mr H need not trouble himself to procure ladies to meet me, his daughter is sufficient, I am more used to, and therefore more at ease in, the company of men - I wish to hear Miss H perform on the harpsichord.[6] I wou'd call some day & take my chance, if I thought I shou'd find your friend at home.

Do not let it be long before I see you, yr last was a very transient visit[7] - believe me to be, with lively esteem, & sincere respect your obligd friend. Mary Hays

6 Fanny Holcroft was known as an accomplished player.

7 He visited two days later and embarrassed Hays who was dressing by the fire. See Letter 26.

Letter 25: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

I have read your manuscript. I do not know exactly the kind of decision you require from me. I believe it would be wrong to suspend your career by particular remarks. I have therefore only to say that it is difficult for any thing to be better than the manner; it is soothing & fascinating; all that remains is to open upon us a story correspondent to the attire in which it is to be clothed.

Wednesday eve
Mar. 9. 1796 W G

1 In *Love-Letters*, p. 235.

Letter 26: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

Thursday Evening - March 10th 96

Now, cannot I settle to anything, till I have sat down to make an apology to you for the blunders of the morning. I was, perhaps, justly punished for my idleness, it is not my general custom to dress by the fire side - but so it happened today, & the consequence I need not inform you. It is not usual with me to have visitants before twelve o'clock, but with my landlady it is frequently the case, your knock therefore did not alarm me. But - you were a little perverse, that you would not walk into the back parlour, for how otherwise was I to make my escape, & had I known how refractory you were, I certainly shou'd not have ventured thro' the passage. I did not see you, & therefore, like the ostrich who believes himself concealed when he hides his head, I hope I was not seen by you - but I confess I was completely mortified, on coming downstairs a few minutes after you had left the house, to find you were gone, & to hear from the servant a detail of the ludicrous particulars. I have laughed, & blushed, twenty times today, at the recollection. Either in my morng dress, or dressed for the day, I shou'd not have hesitated admitting you, at any hour - but I am not sufficiently french in my manners to admit the gentleman to my toilet, & the etceteras of a woman's dress are not adjusted in a moment, on these subjects I am, perhaps, a little over nice. But enough of this, & let me beg you will forget it.

I know not whether you mean I shou'd understand your quick perusal of my papers as a compliment, but it is certain, that I cannot help feeling it as such. This punctuality & promptness is, in my opinion, the charm & the cement of friendship, it adds tenfold worth to every obligation - Oh! how many heart aches shoud I have escaped, had I always been treated with this considerate kindness! It is perhaps your general habit, but it is not on that account the less, but the more, value! Half the miseries of my life has been occasioned by the want of this excellent quality in those with whom I have been connected - It may be, that there are no sufferings more acute, than those which the delicate, susceptible, mind, endures from a state of suspence.[2] You must not be so good & so kind, unless you feel tolerably certain, that my errors & weaknesses will not, in future, deprive me of your esteem. My friendships, lively & constant, become interwoven with my mind & existance - the only real misfortunes in life, in my idea, are the loss & estrangement of friends - Yes; I can bear every thing with more fortitude than the unkindness, or injustice of those whom I regard. - I never expect to experience either from you, & if I am sometimes jealous of your esteem, it is from a deep, & unaffected, conviction of my own want of desert. Tho' my heart has been lacerated by the coldness & - is cruelty too harsh a term? - of one inflexible being[3] - I ought to, & I do, admit the balmy consolation, which is still offerr'd me by many gentle, benevolent, spirits. How much of the happiness of life depends on the nameless, lesser, attentions, which the benign heart dictates, the delicacies of humanity, that escape

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1 In *Love-Letters*, pp. 235-37.

2 Emma Courtney sees a lack of immediate response as a major flaw in Augustus's 'sincerity' towards her.

3 Presumably William Frend.

investigation, & are only to be felt. I have talked of these to people who could not understand me. - I have grieved that they could not, both for their sake & my own. You, my friend, I am convinced are not of this number - you do not, or I am much mistaken, "take your good & evil in the gross".[4] - I do wish you had been in love (but not, as I have, tasted only its bitterness) & then you wou'd always understand me, which you are yet, I doubt, notwithstanding your delicacy & sensibility, too wise & too reasonable to do.[5]

I thank you for the note which accompanied my MS[6] - I thank you for the encouragement it conveyed, but I still feel impatient to have a little conversation with you on the subject - neither shall I get over my mortification of the morng till I have seen you again. On Sunday & Friday (tomorrow) only, do I know of any engagement - you see how I presume, your indulgence spoils me - it produces the greater effect, because I have not lately been - But, why do I revert to the past? - wou'd it were for ever blotted from my memory!

I have been walking all day, & I have tired myself - I cannot believe with Mr H - that 'weariness is not in the limbs'[7] - I feel it, at this moment in mine - tho I am always the better for exercise - it seems (as Dr Johnson expressed it) to rub of the rust of the soul.[8] The sun has shone to day, & the air did not pierce me - I was in health & I wou'd not say - 'all these things are mockery' - I tried to rejoice in the gift of existence! - To night, I anticipate some hours of calm repose - I have the luxuries of cleanliness, of temperate plenty, I have moral & intellectual powers. I am free from the sting of remorse, I foster no corrosive nor malevolent passions - if there are any who have injured me, I wou'd return it only with kindness - And there are still some, yes, I will believe there are some, who look with an eye of tenderness on my faults, & who love my virtues - A gentle & kindly emotion swells my bosom - I am not miserable this evening! How I prate to you of myself & my feelings!

Good night to you, my friend! MH.

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4 See *Memoirs*, I. p. 177:
'The thousand soft sensations -
'Which vulgar souls want faculties to taste,
'Who take their good and evil in the gross.'

5 Godwin was attracted to women such as Elizabeth Inchbald and Amelia Alderson (later Opie) to whom he has been thought to have proposed in July 1796 (see Tomalin, p.258). However, he had also become attracted to Wollstonecraft after January 1796.

6 See Letter 25.

7 Holcroft insisted not only that 'truth had a natural superiority over error' but also that 'it is nonsense to say that we must all die; in the present erroneous system I suppose that I shall die, but why? because I am a fool - Hurra! said I: but if a man chops your head off? - It will be impossible to chop your head off: chopping off heads is error, and error cannot exist. - But if a tree falls on you and crushes you? - Men will know how to avoid falling trees: but trees will not fall: falling of trees arises from error'. Both quotations are in Locke, p.31.

8 In *Rambler 47* Dr Johnson claimed that 'Sorrow is a kind of rust of the soul, which every new idea contributes in its passage to scour away. It is the putrefaction of stagnant life, and it is remedied by exercise and motion'. See *Samuel Johnson* ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 204.

Letter 27: HAYS TO GODWIN

I take up my pen to address you, prompted by inclination, as well as by grateful esteem; yet, I feel, that I am to you, as one whose intellects are exhausted - & that I have nothing interesting to say, nothing deserving your attention. - Neither, can I get rid of the idea, that my late confidence has lower'd me in your esteem, I ought perhaps, to blush myself at the recollection of my extravagant fanaticism - whether from organization, or habit, or a mixture of both, I cannot tell, but I ever have been, &, I fear, ever shall be, in all my pursuits, an incorrigible enthusiast.[1] The fervor of my disposition is rather, I believe, delirium, than vigor - it exhausts, & leaves me vapid & spiritless.

You tell me, that I am 'ill humoured', & you seem to impute to me, as a fault, that I am not always, & equally, pleased. - Ah! my friend! - do you speak from experience, are you, indeed, continually happy & satisfied - do you seek to deceive me, or do you really deceive yourself? I am far from well, I cannot get rid of my cold, morbid & phlegmatic sensations have no tendency to produce cheerfulness; yet I am not more dispirited than usual; the temperature of my mind, has, at present, some resemblance to that of the atmosphere, it is still & gloomy - but the sun will ere long pierce the clouds, & spring will return - Yet, not, I fear, to me!

I am not satisfied with the work I am engaged in, I had better, perhaps, have chosen a different subject, but it is now too late to recede. You urge me, respecting story, I have little invention, am too fastidious, & too addicted to philosophical habits of truth - Impart to me a share of your all creative genius, & I might then have a chance of success.

The most interesting Romance in the world, has little story - Rousseau's Heloise - What presumption is implied in this remark! I begin to be fearful, that I may not be able to preserve my present situation, & indeed, & indeed, I know not how to return!

I am ashamed of thus complaining for ever - of thus for ever repeating - I am not happy - Who is? Nobody but you - &, even, here my scepticism intrudes itself. Your visits to me, lately, are shorter than they used to be, & at longer intervals, no wonder - those who love not their own company, can afford little entertainment to others. But do not think that I mean to be querulous, indeed I do not, I am, & shall ever confess myself, greatly indebted to you - your conduct tow'rds me has had in it, the delicacy of humanity.

But a truce with grave subjects, let me tell you, that I was a good deal entertained, on Monday evening, by a visit I made in the city. There were a few friends of mine present, who smiled & were good humoured, & communicated a corresponding hilarity to my heart. The party was large, a motley groupe, & we kept it up late. Among the

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[1] See note 4 to Letter 11.

strangers were a Dr O-Keefe[2] & a Mr Nirch[3] (if I spell their names right) professors of the Kantian philosophy - they were very civil to me, & endeavoured to teach me their principles - but I confess they conveyed to me no clear ideas. The Dr said he wou'd visit me, if he does, I must introduce him to you, that is, if you are not already acquainted with him. They spake of a Miss Holcroft as one of their disciples - I know not whether it was the daughter of your friend. There were also present military gentleman, fashionable ladies, & a famous performer on the Pedal harp, who brought with him his instrument, to entertain the company - one of the ladies sang, & the german philosopher played on the harpsichord. With one ear, I attended to the music, with the other to the wisdom of the sages, a pretty mixture, while my eyes rested, with pleasure, on the animated countenances of my friends. It was a true English concert, all talk'd & few listen'd, yet my head did not ache, & I came home, at two in the morning, in fresher spirits than when I went out.

Yet, in this festive scene, a sigh wou'd intrude, & once or twice my eyes glistened - I feel the social affections too keenly - Why, why, have my pleasures, been like the light breeze of the summer, which refreshes the air but for a moment? - And why do my pains twist themselves with a thousand complicated emotions & reflections, & rend the heart, ere a separation can be effected?

My friend, will you accept this desultory, idle, chit chat, as a letter, & shall it procure me the satisfaction of your conversation? MH

March 23rd - 1796.

I am ashamed to send you this scrall, but I am really very unwell, & have not spirit, nor power, to write anew.

NB Dr G assured the Kantian gentleman, that I shou'd become their proselyte - for that, like the Athenians, I was ever thirsting after something new. You do not think me so docile, you no longer controvert with me, &, I fear, give me up.

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2 Dr J.A. O'Keeffe whose *An Essay on the Progress of Human Understanding* was reviewed in the *Analytical Review* in December 1795. The *Analytical Review* 22 (1795), pp. 605-7 claims that 'the author gives his reader a glimpse, but in our apprehension a very faint and obscure glimpse, of the system of the celebrated german philosopher Kant' and refers to the forthcoming '"Transactions of the Kantian Society of moral, practical, and speculative philosophy,which will soon commence it's [sic] classical and elementary debates in this metropolis"'.

3 The *Analytical Review* provides a review of *A general and introductory View of Professor Kant's Principles concerning Man, the World and the Deity,* submitted to the Consideration of the Learned. By F.A. Nitsch, late Lecturer of the Latin Language and Mathematics in the Royal Fridericianum College at Konigsberg, and Pupil of Professor Kant'. He is referred to as Mr N. See *Analytical Review,* 25 (1797), pp. 11-23. Holcroft refers frequently to a Mr N--- in connection with Dr G (Mr G----). See diary entry August 9 1798. 'Dined with Geiseveiller, and G---. His German friends came after dinner. F[anny] displayed some knowledge in Grammar; but was laughed at by me and G---, for being a disciple of Kant'. See Hazlitt, III, pp. 33-4.

Letter 28: HAYS TO GODWIN
April 4th - 1796

I am glad you allow, that individual attachment has in it the spirit of true philanthropy - for such is the predominant fate of my character. I have often repeated, with enthusiasm, from Sterne - "Were I in a desert, I wou'd find out wherewith in it to call forth my affections - If I coud do no better, I wou'd fix them upon some sweet myrtle, or seek some melancholy cypress to connect myself to. I wou'd court their shade, & greet them kindly for their protection - I wou'd cut my name upon them, & swear they were the loveliest trees throughout the desart. If their leaves wither'd I wou'd rejoice with them".[1] Yet, has this disposition occasion'd me much suffering, & some degradation - for where my affections have been, in any degree excited, my judgement is too apt to become blinded in proportion, & I labour, against conviction, for arguments to justify my fanaticism. I have been, thro' life, a victim to high wrought, romantic feeling - yes, you are right, to those feelings which made me hunt torture, & cherish despair - And I have grieved as the vision has melted away. I am at present struggling with emotions of this nature: I feel myself compelled to some painful retractions of judgement - I admit them with hesitation, with strong reluctance - but they force themselves upon me! The sensations they produce are uncongenial to my heart - I had a thousand times rather, that heart shou'd continue to be a victim to tender sorrow! Oh! you know not how much satan - ie pride, under the specious garb of gentleness & humility, belongs to my character! I suspect, however paradoxical it might appear, not to you, but to superficial observers, that my forbearance, my meekness, my lowliness, have been all the offspring of pride. I can bear to lose what I love, yes, I can part with it, tho' the blood shou'd follow from my rending heart! - but I cannot bear to suspect that it shou'd sink in value - I wou'd have my enthusiasm justified at the expence of my peace. Is this unnatural - is it virtue - is it selfishness? Sometimes, I incline to hope the first, & then to fear the latter. However this may be, I believe my book will suffer - the elasticity of my mind relaxes with its ardor, & I sometimes suspect, that the spirit of animation is fled for ever. I dread nothing like apathy - to me it is necessary to feel emotion - Ah! do I not feel it at this minute? - In the formation of some people, brain seems left out, in that of others, heart. My character is changing - misanthropy & pride will claim it wholly - I shall learn to imitate the savage virtues (some miscall them) - But why do I dwell on subjects I hate?

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1 See *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, 1756 ed. by Graham Petrie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 51. The passage reads:
'I declare, said I, clapping my hands chearily together, that was I in a desert, I would find out wherewith in it to call forth my affections - If I could not do better, I would fasten them upon some sweet myrtle, or seek some melancholy cypress to connect myself to - I would court their shade, and greet them kindly for their protection - I would cut my name upon them, and swear they were the loveliest trees throughout the desert: if their leaves withered. I would teach myself to mourn, and when they rejoiced, I would rejoice along with them.'

I wonder I write confessions to you, for I have found out, notwithstanding your system, that your character is very reserved - I continually talk of myself, nor dare I indulge a hope, that I am an interesting egotist, but now I will take a better subject, & talk of you. It has been my lot to meet with people that puzzle me, & you are one of those. I have a notion, I do not know you much better, now, than when we first became acquainted. I do not accuse you of duplicity, certainly not, but it appears to me, that you practise the advice of a scotch bard -

"Conceal yoursel as weel's ye can
From critical dissection,
But ken thro' every other man,
With sharpen'd, sly, inspection."[2]

Forgive me, if encouraged by your indulgence, I am sometimes saucy! Yet, some opinions of you, I have ventured to form - I do not think with Mr Thelwall, that your character is cold[3] - Who that reads in your publications - Thoughts that glow, & words that burn can think so; besides, it is a part of my creed, that, strong talents bespeak acute sensations[4] - also, your humane & delicate consideration, on all occasions for my feelings (of which I bear the full sense) convinces me of existing sympathies. I have never known persons fully able to conceive, & allow for, sensations, of which they are themselves wholly incapable - (I speak generally, not as alluding to any particular channels into which the sensibility may be thrown) - of this truth, I have experienced some pretty strong proofs. Well then, (I am in the humour to attempt your character) of your intellectual powers I cannot doubt, I am likewise convinced of your sensibility - I believe, also, that to strong perception, clear discernment, & quick sensation, you add exquisite taste - Hence your rapturous elogium on the brilliant & fascinating, (some critics say, at times, meretricious) ornaments of Edmund Burke's style.[5] As a consequence of these dispositions, I conceive you to be highly fastidious, nor can I ever get rid of the terror of fatiguing you by trifling, or disgusting you by absurdity - And my apprehensions are the greater, because you do not, like my self, wear your feelings on the surface - They resemble, not the babbling stream, but the deep & rapid river - hence superficial observers do not discover them - Often, after you have visited me, & I have been prating, any thing that came into my head, to prolong your stay, & prevent an interval occurring, that might allow you, without being abrupt, to take your

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2 Robert Burns 'Epistle to a Young Friend', stanza 5. The original reads:
Conceal yoursel as weel's ye can
Frae artificial dissection,
But keek thro' ev'ry other man
With sharpen'd, sly, inspection.
Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (Kilmarnock, 1786; repr. as *Robert Burns: Poems, 1786 and 1787*, Menston: Scolar Press, 1971), p. 178.

3 Godwin and John Thelwall disagreed over the aims of The London Corresponding Society causing 'a serious split in the Society'. See *Political Justice*, ed. by Kramnick, pp. 42-50. For a similar comment see Letter 15.

4 Helvetius. See *De l'Esprit*, Chapter 6, 'Of the Power of the Passions'.

5 According to Don Locke *A Fantasy of Reason*, p. 104, Godwin praised Burke 'effusively in the *Political Herald*'.

leave, I am shock'd at reflecting on the trifles, & nonsense, I have been obtruding upon you. No, you are not the disciple of your own system, & I yet know you very imperfectly. After all, I find few people so ingenuous as myself - I have in this, as in most other things, carried my principles beyond the bounds of prudence - to a romantic extreme. But before I have done, let me give you credit for what I have myself experienced - candor, humanity, kindness, patient communication of knowledge! - I shall not forget the debt I owe you, gratitude is a part of the selfish system. I perceive how kindly you try to encourage me in the work I am at present prosecuting - & perceiving, feel its full value. Yet, I have, on the subject, for various reasons, an unaffected diffidence. I no longer think, that author's put into their works their best thoughts - the idea of publication (while engaged in composition) hangs on my mind, like a dead weight, nor can I continue to forget it.

I wrote a letter to you while my mind was in a painful state, a wild, incoherent letter, which I suppose expressed feeling - I wish to refer to it - will you lend it me, also, the two next, if you can readily find them among your papers - I shall esteem it a favour?[6]

I think you once asked me whether Mr Christie was in Town[7] - I am informed that he is - Mrs Imlay is also return'd, & at their house[8] - I am sorry to add, her health appears in a still more declining state. It does not signify what is the cause, but her heart, I think, is broken. I am in better health than I was, but weary of most things & more than all of myself - My mind has had too many <u>caustics</u> of late - a sort of operation which never agreed with it - yet, I have had my share - You, my friend, have administer'd <u>only lenients</u> - & shall I not acknowledge them - shall I not thank you?

I am not miserable - but my spirit is benighted - I have lost its sunshine - <u>the cloud sits deep</u>.

Adieu my friend, may all happiness continue to attend you - you deserve it - you have no extravagant follies - As for myself, I cou'd now wish to live till my work is finished - & then - close my eyes on the wretched farce of life. MH

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6 See Letters 20, 22, 23.

7 Thomas Christie, 1761-1796, with Joseph Johnson co-founder of the *Analytical Review*.

8 Finsbury Square, London where Wollstonecraft was taken after her second suicide attempt. See Tomalin, pp. 232-37.

Letter 29: HAYS TO GODWIN Friday morng

I wonder, if I were to say - I would write to you no more, which I should punish most, you or myself! - For the 'b-st-y solitude in which I live, requires, that I, who am so fond of talking, especially about myself, should sometimes unburthen my mind: and it flatters my vanity - still myself! - to believe a great philosopher interests himself in my prattle.

But besides abusing my letters on your yesterday's visit, you were not - indeed you were not! - 'pretty behaved'. In the first place, while I had determined to banish selfish sensation, had dressed myself with more than usual care, & exerted all my powers to amuse you, you must needs chuse to be 'stupid' - a pretty compliment! I am destined to mortification - Do you think I can always be so meek & so forgiving a creature? I perceive the men are all tyrants. From you, the complaint of stupidity was an intolerable affront - other people might have attributed it to the temperature of the atmosphere, but you acknowledge no physical causes.[1] I should like to know, whether it had a selfish one. Secondly, you were too curious, & too ensnaring, upon a certain subject[2] - &, on another, exerted your influence to make me forego my principles, & hazard the being unjust. No, no, none of your arguments convinced me, I am, at times, a very untractable being.

And now, as to ingenuousness - you were both ungrateful & malicious - you charged me with loving secresy - and I deserved this - did I, from you? After you had left me, a recollection again popt into my head, that I had well nigh forgotten. - What is become of the secret which, a long time since, you engaged to reveal to me, at a certain & limited period?[3] That period has long elapsed, & still I remain in the dark. I challenge you! - Who now is the disciple of their own system? I suspect, that in making this enquiry, I am hunting after no good - Punish me then! I have been tolerably disciplined in the school of humility. With-hold this intelligence, whatever be its nature, & accuse me again of reserve - & I will admire your philosophical consistency. Ah! do you not perceive, that I am a little revengeful?

And so, all the errudition you will allow me, while I have been priding myself in my knowledge, is the having read catechisms, books of questions & answers. - And you really think, or at least wish to persuade me, you think, that by sagely contemplating the effects of the passions, in mortals living in Greece & Rome, lord knows how long ago, we can annihilate our own, at present existing! How much further, on some occasions, does a little

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1 See *Political Justice*, I, pp. 55-6, where Godwin states:

> we have already established it as a fundamental, that there are no innate ideas. Of consequence, if men were principally governed by external circumstances such as that of atmosphere, their characters and actions would be much alike. The same weather, that made you a coward, would make me so too, and an army would be defeated by a fog. [...] Everything that checks the uniformity of this effect, and permanently distinguishes the character of one man from that of another, is to be traced to the association of ideas. But association is the nature of reasoning. [...] In reality the atmosphere, instead of considerably affecting the mass of mankind, affects in an eminent degree only a small part of that mass.

2 Presumably the subject was the name of Hays's lover.

3 Perhaps the relationship between Godwin and Wollstonecraft which had been growing since January.

nature & experience go, than philosophy! On these subjects, I have got beyond my catechism.

You are, at once, kind & cruel, polite & rude, tender & savage, candid & intolerant - I cannot describe, how paradoxical you appear to me.

I prove my temerity, by thus daring to be impertinent, while consigning to your charge the precious offspring of my brain - Like a weak & fond parent, I see in this darling, nothing but beauties - Pray do not resemble the nurse in Gay's fables.[4] I feel all over author, & shrink from criticism, like the sensitive plant. But the MS has so much in it of sentiment, sensation, & selfishness, that I was willing, for once, to risque the being saucy, rather than to harp always upon one string.

Before I conclude, I must tell you, that as your name is now enrolled among those of the few people whom I like - & you know me given to monstrous partialities - I grant you, occasionally, the privelege of being rude '& stupid', but not of staying away.

Another remark - you did not like Miss Hamilton,[5] forsooth, because she was not very young nor beautiful - did I give you any reason to expect this? - & do you not know how prone I am to appropriate observations? The pretty Miss_____ perhaps never finds you 'stupid'![6] I am mortal jealous & very spiteful, & wish you, in return for all your crimes, to be most desperately & hopelessly in love - Beware! - your favorite Rousseau says, that your grave, philosophical people, who are not subject to these passions, when once entangled, are lost for ever![7] It remains for Miss I___h___d to make proof of this!

I am foolish, because I would not be sad - But now, seriously, I await your decision, my vanity & my avarice, up in arms - thirsting after fame & riches! The best method, I believe of quieting one troublesome passion, is to combat it with half a dozen more.[8] I am not merry, neither am I well - I feel an intolerable pain & weariness all over me, which I have been trying, in vain, to write off. I will add no more, except to repeat for the thousandth time, how sincerely I am your obliged friend. M Hays

- NB - However 'beastly' solitude may be, remember - It is the noblest animals who live alone - while the weak & the timid, conscious of their defenceless state, flock together.

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4 Fable 3, 'The Mother, the Nurse, and the Fairy'. See John Gay, *Fables*, (London: Tonson and Watts, 1727; repr. Menston: Scolar Press, 1969), pp. 9-11. The opening quotation of Letter 31 is taken from this fable.

5 Elizabeth Hamilton 1758 - 1816, novelist and friend of E. Gregory. Hays was to quarrel with Hamilton whose satirical novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800) cast Hays as Brigetina Botherim. See Letters 36, 37, 46.

6 Elizabeth Inchbald 1753-1821 playwright, novelist and critic, whom Godwin had been seeing during 1796 and to whom he might have proposed. See Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, p. 211. Wollstonecraft calls her 'Mrs Perfection'. See Wardle, *Godwin and Mary*, p. 11.

7 Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Eloisa*. Lord B suggests this to St Preux (III, p. 200).

8 See *Monthly Magazine*. 9 (1800), pp. 523-24, 'Remarks on Dr Reid on Insanity'.

You & I live by ourselves, like the lion in his den, while other people, who might be named, herd together, like pigs in a sty.

Tuesday May 3rd - 1796

I have been seriously ill, my friend, since I wrote the above - the symptoms which I hinted, were the prelude to a fever, occasioned I believe by a collection of bile, which anxiety of mind has a tendency to generate in the constitution. Under this idea, I took medicines to remove the bile, their powerful operation convinced me, I was not mistaken. The disorder lay much in my head, & at one period a frightful confusion of thought made me very apprehensive of delirium. But the fever is now, I trust, entirely removed, & I feel only great debility - I am going to take some bark - (I have been my own physician, for I was formerly very much injured by an ignorant apothecary) - & I mean to get out in the air as soon as possible. I never felt my spirits so calm under indisposition - for the truth is, tho' I shrink from suffering, I could have been well pleased to die - life has lost, for me, every charm. Though I have said my indisposition was serious, I did not apprehend from it any fatal consequences, nor did I lie in bed a whole day together, this I never do, while I am at all able to rise - I believe I shou'd have been very bad, had I not early endeavoured to remove the cause.

Letter 30: HAYS TO GODWIN

If you are susceptible of sympathy, which I have no reason to doubt, I need not attempt to describe to you, the painful situation of mind in which you left me, on your last visit. The repugnance I feel to making the alteration in my story, which you suggested, is so strong, that nothing but my friendship for you, & deference for your judgement, could combat it for a moment. Yes, my friendship for you, & sense of your kindness, suspends & counteracts the strongest sentiment of my soul - & will you still call me selfish, obstinate, & immovable? I have no strength, no independence, of mind, I am govern'd in all things by my attachments - I act upon no steady principles, I am forever the victim of contending emotions. But while your influence shakes my resolution, & renders me wavering, where I thought myself determined, I cannot yeild a ready assent - I must still argue the case with you. In the first place, I am by no means convinced, that a hopeless, persevering, & unrequited, attachment, is in itself uninteresting - it is a proof of a lively & strong imagination, of a sanguine, an enterprising, an ardent, an unconquerable, spirit - It is strength, tho' ill directed. The love of Petrarch for Laura was of this nature[1] - The famous & unfortunate passion of Hoel, with many others that have been celebrated in the fictions of poetry & romance.[2] That it is not an impossible event, my own experience affords a proof - perhaps, it is congenial to a susceptible & metaphisical turn of mind. Its existence is in the imagination, rather than in the senses - I doubt whether fruition might not be its grave. It is the child of chivalry & refinement. It is the illusion of a raised fancy, enamoured of the magic of its own creative powers. There have even been instances of a passion of this nature being conceived for a purely ideal object - call it frenzy, if you please, every species of fanaticism, strictly speaking, is deserving of this appellation - alas! then, the world is one great madhouse. The austerity of character which I have given to my hero, is by no means one of the circumstances which always quenches love - our passions are never very strong without a mixture of the sublime in them - I mean in Mr Burkes sense - some emotion allied to an apprehension of power - to terror & astonishment.[3] To what fervent excesses has the love of a Supreme Being been carried, a sentiment always strongly impregnated with fear. Neither do I allow, that the passion of my heroine had in it no mixture of hope or encouragement (you may apply the same observations, if you please to myself) - The obstacles which opposed it were always

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1 Petrarch (1304-74), Italian poet who wrote sonnets in praise of Laura.

2 Various poems were celebrating the passion of the Welsh poet Hoel. See Anna Seward, *Llangollen Vale, with other Poems*, (London: Sael, 1796), (title-page), and Thomas Gray, whom Hays was fond of quoting, who wrote *The Death of Hoel*, probably in 1761. The second stanza reads:

> Too, too secure in youthful pride,
> By them my friend, my Hoel died,
> Great Cian's son: of Madoc old
> He ask'd no heaps of hoarded gold;
> Alone in Nature's wealth array'd,
> He ask'd and had the lovely maid.

3 See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) ed. by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

obscurely seen - mystery is a fine material for manufacture - We are rendered credulous by our passions, & a heart sincerely affected finds it difficult to relinquish its errors, even after absolute conviction. What does Rousseau say - who seems to have experienced & understood these sensations more & certainly painted them better than any man - "The impossibility of being happy fanned the flame which it ought to have extinguished. A flattering delusion had supported me under all my sorrows - When that was gone I had not strength to oppose them. While I had any hope, I might have triumphed over my inclinations, it wou'd have cost me less to have spent my whole life in resistance, than to renounce you for ever, & the very idea of an everlasting opposition deprived me of fortitude to subdue my passion. Grief & love preyed upon my heart. I experienc'd what every virtuous mind feels that does wrong & is fond of its mistake. I perceived that I had fallen into a state truly despicable, & felt myself completely wretched. Love did not make me blind to your faults, but it made those faults dear to me, & its delusion was so powerful, that had you been more perfect, I shou'd have loved you less".[4] And after all, perhaps, the true secret of rendering any affection interesting in description, depends not on the cicumstances of that affection, but on the manner in which it is described - You allow that in this, I have not wholly failed - & why? Because we never paint well, but when we feel our subject[5] Were I now to alter what I have written - (yet, I do not say, that I will not alter it) - I shou'd of course do it languidly - some of the most energetic sentiments wou'd be no longer appropriate - especially the letter which you have more than once mentioned with praise, & which was perhaps written with more force than anything I ever have written, or shall write again.[6] - It appears, then, to me, that what my story may gain in one respect, it will more than lose in another. At any rate, I cannot make any material alteration on this subject without rendering useless the greater part of my MS. Whether the affection was reciprocal must still remain, in some measure, equivocal - & at present it is not, nor did I mean it to be, a circumstance perfectly clear & unambiguous. I will also add - (but do not ridicule me, it is a subject on which I cannot yet, nor I believe ever shall be able to bear jesting - The wound is too recent, & the scar too deep). Yes, I confess, I cannot be unaffected by private motives. I would not wish a certain individual to suppose, that I had the vanity to believe myself beloved - much less

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4 *Eloisa*, II, pp. 199 - 203. In the original, Eloise confesses to St Preux:

> The impossibility of being happy, fanned the flame which it ought to have extinguished. A flattering delusion had supported me under all my troubles; when that was gone, I had no strength to oppose them. While I had the least hope of being yours, I might have triumphed over my inclinations; it would have cost me less to have spent my whole life in resistance, than to renounce you for ever, and the very idea of an everlasting opposition, deprived me of fortitude to subdue my passion.
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> Grief and love preyed upon my heart; [...] I experienced what every honest mind feels when it goes astray, and is fond of its mistake. [...] I perceive that I had fallen into a state truly despicable, and felt myself completely wretched. [...] Love did not make me blind to your faults, but it made those faults dear to me; and its delusion was so powerful, that, had you been more perfect, I shou'd have loved you less.

5 'He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most', Alexander Pope, *Eloise to Abelard*, (1717), 366.

6 Probably Letter 20.

wou'd I be thought to insinuate a notion false & injurious to him, that he had sacrificed my peace to cold-hearted & vilely selfish coquetry. By writing to divert, perhaps to disburthen, my mind under the immediate pressure of disappointment, I feel that I have entangled myself - nor do I now see any satisfactory method of removing the difficulties that press on every side. Yet I have made no determinations, nor do I ask you to spare my feelings (except that you must not treat the subject with levity) Good God! What a train of circumstances does one error involve, how does it mix with, & poison, every source of action! You tell me, I seem to understand but one sort of love - you are mistaken - had I never tasted the sweets of reciprocal affection - a sentiment so congenial to my heart! - I had never pursued, with frenzied extravagance, a renewal of those delightful emotions, for the absence of which nothing can compensate.

If it were possible for me to repent of insincerity, I shou'd regret the confidence I have reposed in you - I cannot hide from myself, that I have forfeited your esteem - your compassion for my errors borders on contempt - it mortifies without consoling me. - You see in me nothing but vice & selfishness, & you begin to consider me as incorrigible - yet, I ask no lenity - I respect you when you tell me the truth, & the pains which I suffer will, I trust, be salutary.

Respecting the philosophical part of my MS, I shall be less tenacious, & I will labour to remove the inferior defects which you have pointed out - neither have I absolutely decided respecting your grand objection.

I am mortified to find how frequently we differ, because it inspires me with distrust for my own principles. You treated coquet'ry as a light & venal fault - to me, it appears an odious & contemptible vice - while I feel the passion I seek to inspire, my views do not terminate wholly in myself - I am hurried on by an imperious & uncontroulable instinct - I am at once the sport & the victim of my own sensations - the ardor, the energy of my feelings excuse, while they enhance, my crime. But those appear to me incapable of either love or friendship, incapable of every generous affection, who coldly & deliberately trifle with the happiness of another for the mean, the...[7]

7 Manuscript incomplete. The contents date it as probably May 1796.

"Lord, Madam, what a squinting leer!
No doubt, the fairy has been here.
The woman's blind - the Mother cries -
I see wit sparkle in his eyes."[1]

Ah! you savage-hearted & barbarous critic! And do you really expect that I shall be endowed with sufficient patience to rewrite the MS? I, whose characteristics are impetuosity & obstinacy! - to say nothing of my vanity & idleness, of which I have my full share. Thank heaven, all the world are not as delicate & fastidious as you are, or woe be to the poor authors!

Well but you have given us an example of good writing, & therefore you have a claim to attention - & did I not determine to yield you this attention, I shou'd be unworthy of the benevolent pains you have taken, both with me & my papers - A thousand times I thank you! Be not unjust to me & to yourself - say not, that you are mortified to find how little impression you have made on my mind. - What influence would you wish to possess? Remember the different circumstances by which our characters have been formed - recollect the strong enchantments which have bound my mind in adamantine spells - & then triumph, for you have cause, in the powerful diversion you have affected. How often have you poured the light of reason upon my benighted spirit! What struggles have you caused in a heart abandoned to its passions! Ah! did you fully comprehend the frenzy to which I have been a victim, you wou'd cease to wonder at the many conflicts I have sustained - the many which perhaps, I have still to endure. I own, they have shaken my health but I do not yield to them - & I am already more tranquil, more rational, than I had hoped or expected to be in so short an interval, & for much of this tranquillity I feel myself indebted to you. Be not then discouraged - be not disgusted to find I have yet advanced no further - my malady was too inveterate to be easily or quickly cured - it was a proof of strength, but strength ill directed.

I will not deceive you, unless I first deceive myself. My MS was not written merely for the public eye - another latent, & perhaps stronger, motive lurked beneath - If this in some respects has spoiled my story, (for I suspect most of your remarks are just) it has also given to it, that "energy of feeling, & ardor of expression" which impressed you. No, my friend, my story is too real, I cannot violate its truth, by making Augustus either a coquet or a lover[2] - I have a melancholy satisfaction in presenting to the stubborn heart, which I sought in vain to melt, a just, but far from an exaggerated picture, of its own cruel & inflexible severity - yet tho' 'cruel' he was not 'worthless' - I urged him too far - carried on

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1 John Gay, 'The Mother, the Nurse, and the Fairy'. See *Fables* (repr. 1969), p. 10. The lines read:
The woman's blind, the Mother crys,
I see wit sparkle in his eyes.
Lord! Madam, what a squinting leer!
No doubt the Fairy hath been here.

2 The unsympathetic character of Augustus was singled out by the *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), pp. 177-78. See chapter four.

headlong by my own sensations I did not sufficiently respect his. I confess my fanaticism - I anticipate your censures - & I submit to them.

One of your observations I confess gave me considerable pain, respecting the 'radical defect of my novel' - My heroine, interested only about herself, will find it difficult to interest others for her. - I understand your application but too well, & I plead not guilty. No tragedy, no fiction, can affect the passions, that does not concentrate them, in a great measure in one object. - It is the nature of strong passion, particularly in retirement, to be absorbed in its sensations[3] - without this a passion wou'd cease to be strong - No terrible effects are to be dreaded from an impression that can easily be diverted - the moment you give the stream vent by different channels, the inundation is no longer to be feared.[4] But my heroine (whom I by no means intended to draw a perfect character) could weep for the distresses of Augustus, unconnected with any idea which respected herself - could suspend her own emotions in attention to a sick friend (Mrs Harley) - & again, in performing her duty to the girl whom her husband had seduced. Could exert herself, to return the casual civilities of a passenger in the stage coach. I do not recollect any instance in which she is wanting in proper civility or humanity - Nor do I think, your own Caleb Wms, or Falkland, allowing for the different situations in which they are placed, less absorbed in their peculiar sufferings - & it is those individual sufferings which constitute the interest. Whether it is natural to love, or to hope, with so little encouragement, cannot be a question with me - and I intended this book to be a memento of my own folly or madness, call it which you please! Again, you wish my heroine to reproach herself with having tried to seduce the affections of a married man when she knew not that he was married. This might be 'dramatic', but excuse me for saying, it is a morality I shou'd disdain nor do I feel any thing reprehensible in the unpremeditated conversation in the library, during the storm - If there was guilt in any part of it, the guilt belonged only to Augustus - And again, I repeat, I professed to draw no perfect or sublime characters.[5] My aim was merely to shew, & I searched into my own heart for the model, the possible effects of the present system of things, & the contradictory principles which have bewilder'd mankind, upon private character, & private happiness.

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3 See *Eloisa*, I, p. 114: 'The truest passions are formed and nourished in retirement. In the busy circle of the world there is no time for receiving impressions, and even, when received, they are considerably weakened by the variety of avocations which continually occur.'

4 See Helvetius, *De l'Esprit*, p. 8, which discusses the inevitable consequences of pursuing strong passions in isolation: 'Passions lead us to error because they fix our attention on that particular part of the object they present to us, not allowing us to view it on every side'. See also *Monthly Magazine*, 9 (1800), p. 523: 'Attention divided is necessarily weakened. From the torrent sluiced into many channels, there is little dread of devastation.'

5 The Preface to *Memoirs* states that:

> it has commonly been the business of fiction to pourtray characters, not as they really exist, but, as, we are told, they ought to be - a sort of *ideal perfection*, in which nature and passion are melted away, and jarring attributes wonderfully combined.
>
> In delineating the character of Emma Courtney, I had not in view these fantastic models: I meant to represent her, as a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion, liable to the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature (I, pp. 7-8).

Although Hays anticipated criticism of her heroine, she did not seem to be prepared for antagonism towards the hero.

It is true, I feel, that it wou'd have been infinitely more interesting had my heroine been beloved, but this wou'd not have been the story I meant it should be, & to this scarcely any of the sentiments wou'd have been appropriate - It would also in my opinion have had less originality - in short, it would have made totally different characters. As to my philosophical letters, it is a hobby-horsical subject with me, & I doubt I shall not be able to prevail upon myself to omit them, nor am I at all conscious of 'misrepresenting' or 'unfairly' attempting to 'crush' my opponent, neither am I yet able to comprehend the difference between me & this respected opponent.[6]

Your remarks on my heroine's 'vanity' made me smile, you are right, she is vain, & so am I, I will try to correct this foible in both.

All your other criticisms, I will attentively revise & consider, when my mind regains its elastic powers. That you think the MS worth mending is praise - In some cases, I may be obstinate, but I will not be idle. When you next visit me bring this letter, & let us calmly talk the matter over. The trouble you have taken is a real favour conferr'd - I feel the powers of yr goodness, your friendship - words wou'd inadequately express those feelings. MH

6 Godwin in the character of Mr Francis.

Letter 32: HAYS TO GODWIN June 6 - 1796.

I perceive, that I am again about to write you a desultory letter - But has not your conversation, of late, been likewise a little desultory? I can only write as you afford me subjects. On our first acquaintance, impressed by the idea of your literary reputation, I carefully digested what I wished to say to you, & corrected on a fair copy my first crude thoughts - Now, tho' my respect & esteem have encreased, they are in some measure soften'd by the familiarity of friendship, & I can take up my pen when my heart, or mind, is full, & unburthen them with freedom, & without previous study, in the flattering hope, that with all my faults, I have yet some little interest in your regard & sympathy.

I wish you would not accuse me so frequently, & sometimes so unmercifully, of selfishness. Were I indeed so selfish, my heart wou'd not sink under the cruel necessity of being obliged to restrain its feelings, & "cut off from the opportunities of expanding its sensations & wedding itself to society, be constrained to bestow the strong affections, that glow consciously within it, upon a few."[1] I am unhappy, I confess, & my eyes fill with tears while I write - but do not let me forfeit your esteem tho' you shou'd consider my misfortunes as my faults.

I thank you for introducing Miss Alderson to me[2] - her spirits appear unbroken - She does not look as if sorrow ever touch'd her heart. I am not sure, that her manners entirely pleased me - I mean to say, that I have some unfashionable & obsolete notions & prejudices - I love the retireing delicacy that sometimes shrinks from observation. - Assured, fearless, & self-satisfied, Miss A must have long since forgotten to blush or to hesitate - You laugh at me, & with reason perhaps - I am out of my place - I should have been born a century earlier or later. The age of chivalry might have suited me, or the age of reason - but, in the present motley times, I am an alien - an awkward being.

Excuse me for the contents of my last letter - it was a subject upon which my feelings might easily mislead me - It was a subject which I now wish to be forgotten by myself - & yet more by the few to whom I have ventured to unfold my mind & its weakness. One observation only permit me to make, tho' you should be disgusted with the vain & selfish creature ever labouring to excuse herself - I shou'd never have been attached to Mr ___ had I not conceived his principles & conduct to have been magnanimous, had he not been persecuted for those principles, & a sufferer by that conduct![3] Yes! I will say, with pride, my affection had its source in generosity & virtue - & - I am well repaid - And now let me quit, for ever, the ungrateful topic.

I have a favour to ask of you, my dear friend - Will you give me a sketch for the review of Theodore Cyphon - or will you write it wholly & permit me to copy it?[4] On your own

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1 Presumably Godwin writing to Hays. See Letter 20, note 8.

2 Amelia Alderson.

3 William Frend.

4 For Godwin's reply see Letter 34.

principles you should not refuse me, your criticisms may be useful. Tell me from what part a quotation should be selected, or if it would be proper to give any? I shou'd be obliged by the return of the books in the course of the week, as I could wish to send my parcel to J____n in time for the next journal.[5]

I feel that I grow a little unreasonable in my claims upon your time - I am aware of its value - but your indulgence has spoiled me: & whether you are 'stupid' or animated, I always feel that I gain some knowledge or improvement by your conversation. I am fond of analyzing my feelings, were I some years younger - or you many years older, I might call my regard for you filial - though that is not an adequate term - it has in it the deference of a pupil, the respect of which is due to superior talents & powers, the grateful sentiments which are excited in a susceptible temper for kindness conferred, & the cordiality & affection of equal friendship. I could wish, when you visit me, that you wou'd act with the same unconstrained freedom as in your own apartments, that you would read, write (I can always supply you with the implements) or converse, just as you are in the humour. I shou'd be more gratified & flatter'd by your seeming thus entirely at liberty - I shou'd feel it as a truer compliment, than all the observances which are dictated by etiquette or sanctioned by custom. 'Form in friendship (Mr Robinson of Cambridge used to say) resembled ceremony in religion'.[6] The heart has no share in either. M. Hays

NB. Do not misconceive me respecting Miss A, I am not a niggard of praise - She appeared to me to possess talents & powers of pleasing, with an engaging frankness of character & a happy vivacity - all that the french term piquant. But perhaps the [ ] more powerfully awakens my sympathy. I shall be glad to see her on her return to Town, & will ask some friends to meet her - you, I hope, will do me that favor?

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5 Joseph Johnson publisher of *The Analytical Review* which carried an unsigned review of *Theodore Cyphon or, the Benevolent Jew* by George Walker (1796) in June which is based on Godwin's suggestions. See *Analytical Review*, 23 (1796), pp. 600-1.

6 Robert Robinson.

Letter 33: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

I have filled my paper, but you never told me you were wearied with long letters, or disgusted with my egotism, I will therefore yet add a few lines more. Our acquaintance has now been of some standing, & you have always found me complaining, & a prey to vexation, you have therefore a right to conclude that my temper is wayward & discontented, but your conclusion would not be just. The circumstances which form'd my mind - particularly my first attachments, which have great power over a heart of sensibility - rendered three things necessary to my existence - affections, virtue, & self-respect. After the death of my lover,[2] my heart still true to the sentiment, was restless & unhappy till it again found an object to which to attach itself - This was a work of time - my second attachment was entirely generated on an apprehension of magnanimous principles, of high & [uncommon] worth, & cemented by a sympathy with what I conceived injustice & misfortune.[3] - Its progress, its mistakes, & its consequences you have seen. Those consequences have at one blow, deprived me of all my sources of consolation. It wou'd be romantic now to expect those affections for which I have only lived - Could I find a man who really possessed those qualities I require (such a one may exist) - or to abate my demand - did I know any man calculated to make me rationally happy, & to heal the wounds which have been inflicted on me - I cannot disguise from myself, that even the best men have catched a corrupt contagion, & seem to require other charms than integrity, sensibility, & the simplicity of affection. I have few personal attractions, had nature given me more. I am ignorant of, or I despise, certain arts - To meretricious or coquettish allurement I shall ever be a stranger - I know how to love but I must love with delicacy & purity, & so must I be beloved, or I shou'd feel only horror & disgust. You smile at my romance, & perhaps with reason, yet, I know you will not suspect me of affectation - Indeed, I have given sufficient proofs that I am no prude - but I cannot separate delicacy of taste & passion. I could from habit have continued to love the man to whom I had been so long attached, had he not so rudely repelled me. I could even have been contented to have yeilded him up if I could have justified myself in my extravagance, & preserved my respect for him unabated - this I cannot do, & it is this which humbles me, & which sinks me in my own esteem, the more so, as I cannot yet, tho' truth glares upon me, entirely disentangle my affections. Thus are my heart & my pride equally wounded, & how can I, so situated, dare to make pretensions to virtue - I, who am consuming the vigor of life, time, talents, & opportunity, in unavailing anguish, in the struggle of contending passions. "All, then, that might have germinated into usefulness is converted into henbane & deadly

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1 A continuation of Letter 32 to which Godwin replies on the reverse of this, thus dating it also 6 June 1796.

2 John Eccles.

3 William Frend.

nightshade".[4] I have laid before you a faithful representation of my mind. I almost wish sometimes you could find time to write to me, letters, you say, make a greater impression than words, & I can perceive in conversation your kind fear of hurting my sore & sickly mind renders you less frank & sincere than your principles ought to make you. - Banish this humane caution, I will not shrink from the truth, & I am convinced you will not speak it, in a harsh or indelicate manner.

4 From the Postscript to *Caleb Williams*. See Letter 1, note 8.

Letter 34: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

Why ask me to write a review, who almost constantly refuse to write a letter? "It would be useful?" No, madam, that is no sufficient reason, I must not only do things useful, but out of various utilities select the best.

I should say, there are so many excellencies in your book, as to prove that you couild do well. I should remonstrate against the servile imitation he has so glaringly practised towards two different works. I should present him with a terrific selection of the gibberish with which the work abounds, & earnestly press it upon him, that the man who would write, must write a human language, observe its proprieties, & ever cultivate its delicacies.

But why should you say these things, if you do not think them?

1 On the reverse of Letter 33.

Letter 35: HAYS TO GODWIN

I had sent my letter to the post before I receiv'd your note. I had then to put off an engagement which I had made for Thursday - This is now adjusted, & I shall be happy to see you, & your charming friend,[1] on the day appointed.

MH.

Tuesday evening

NB Do not tell Mrs I - y,[2] that I suspected she did not like criticism - I love her - "a word in which is comprehended every thing that is kind"[3] - it wou'd grieve me to offend her.

1 Mary Wollstonecraft whom Godwin was seeing regularly by this time.

2 Wollstonecraft continued to be known as Mrs Imlay until her marriage to Godwin.

3 Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art* (1796). See Letter 23, note 4.

Letter 36: HAYS TO GODWIN[1]

My dear friend, I shall send the review to Hamilton's in its present state, I shall then have discharged my duty: Dr G may afterwards curtail, or omit, it, as he pleases, I shall never be offended with him, because I am convince he never means to offend me, & I always estimate the worth of my friends by their intentions, not by their opinions.[2] If ever I venture on original composition, it will be for the declared purpose of combating, without fear or reserve, those pernicious prejudices, which have prey'd upon the vitals of human virtue & happiness, & to which moral martyrs have been sacrificed in hecatombs.[3] I know not whether open profligacy is not a less evil than timid & wretched expedients, that, like a feeble barrier, arrest the current for a moment, till its accumulated waters swell into a resistless torrent. Nothing great, nothing effectual, will ever be done, till we have the courage to look on truth with the eye of an eagle, her light may discover, but it will always assist us in removing, the accumulated rubbish of ages. I remember hearing the late Dr Price say, that infidelity had done less mischief than superstition, the first may have slain its thousands, but the latter has destroy'd its ten thousands.[4]

I feel myself much obliged to Dr G for the books sent me, because to preserve my present situation,[5] which I am very desirous of doing, it is necessary that I shou'd encrease my income, &, at present, I have no other employment, but, unfortunately, differing so much from the editors in opinion, I now consider it rather as a matter of business than of principle, I cannot write what I do not, or suppress what I do, think, but after the reviews are out of my hands I consider myself as no longer answerable for them. I trust to Dr G--s candor that he will excuse my freedom, & that a difference in sentiment will make none in friendship &c.

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1 If, as seems likely, Hays is referring to a review of Elizabeth Hamilton's novel *Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah; written previous to, and during the Period of his Residence in England*, the letter would have been written before October 1796 when an unfavourable review attributed to Hays by Eliza Hamilton appeared in the *Analytical Review* (see *Analytical Review*, 24 (1796). pp. 429-31). However, a supportive one appeared in the *Critical Review* for July. As Dr Gregory was both editor and friend of Hamilton, it is possible that this is the one referred to in this letter. See the *Critical Review*, 16 (1796), pp. 241-49. See also Letter 37 from Eliza Hamilton referring to the review in the *Analytical Review*.

2 Dr Gregory.

3 As Hays had already written *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* her allusion to 'original composition' must be an acknowledgement that her novel was based on her own experience and, hence, was not 'original'.

4 Dr Richard Price 1723-91. Dissenting minister whose sermon 'On the Love of our Country' in 1789 was the catalyst for Burke's *Reflections*. He ministered at the Gravel Pit Unitarian Chapel which Hays is thought to have attended.

5 Her apartments at 30 Kirby Street.

Letter 37: ELIZA HAMILTON TO HAYS

Dear Madam

From the length of time that has elapsed since the subject of your letter has occupied even a momentary place in my thoughts, I could not avoid surprise at its receit [sic], or regret at its perusal.

I confess I am very sorry that you should thus have arrested on its road to oblivion, a subject which in my apprehension it would have been much wiser to have permitted quietly to have taken its course to eternal rest: but since you have thus called upon me for an avowal, or a recantation of the opinion you already heard me give, the silence which I have from that evening invariably maintained, must of necessity be broken.

You assert the "purity of your intentions". I am afraid I am not sufficiently versed in the new nomenclature of virtues thoroughly to understand your meaning. In my old fashioned way of thinking, purity of intentions comprehends candour, and sincerity, and is altogether incompatible with every shade or degree of treachery, or malevolence. In the case which you have forced upon my recollection there is no need of any appeal to the recording Angel in search of the inspiring motive. The Action speaks for itself.

A book is published containing no accusation against any sect or party; throwing out no aspersions upon any character. No personal reflections. No invidious remarks upon the conduct of any individual; but which without quoting a single line from any authority, or bringing forward a single incident that could point out any particular person as the object of its innocent raillery, merely raises a laugh at some self-evident absurdities. This book is written by a person for whom you professed a degree of friendship, whom you flattered with expressions of your esteem. And to whom you had in confidence confessed how severely you had felt the slight animadversions that had been made upon your first performance in one of the reviews.[1] With a perfect recollection of the pains you had experienced in your friend; And with the smile of friendship upon your face, did you voluntarily offer yourself as the instrument of inflicting similar pains upon the mind of that unsuspecting friend. (You must forgive me if I declare from my own knowledge that the books being put into your hands by the editor of the review is a misstatement of the case, unless you shelter yourself by the same sort of literal equivocation you made use of when you said you had not seen the review.)

The task was not put upon you. No. With the ardour of an ancient champion did you volunteer your entrance into the lists, but not with the generosity of an ancient knight did you maintain the combat. Instead of fairly, and openly, pointing out the passages which displeased you, that betwixt you and the author the world might have it in their power to

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1 Presumably, the critical response to *Letters and Essays* by the *English Review*. See chapter two of this study.

decide. You, in the dark, and with a muffled dagger aimed the blow which was to fix, as far as it is in the power of a review to fix, the fame and character of the person you saluted as a friend! That it did not more deeply wound, was not owing to the compunction of the heart which dictated - but to the feebleness of the arm which struck the blow. - For the praise which you were pleased to bestow upon some parts of my 'little work', you seem to think I owe you much acknowledgment. I confess I am inclined to say of it, in the words made use of by Thomson upon a similar occasion

> Why not all faults? Injurious critic why,
> Appears one beauty to thy blasting eye?
> Damnation worse than thine, if worse can be
> Is all I ask, and all I want from thee.

As this is determinedly the last time that I ever will put pen to paper upon the subject, I cannot conclude without one further observation. In my opinion it is a strange sort of a compliment you pay your friend Mr Godwin, in taking it for granted that he has made a monopoly of all the absurdity, and extravagance in the world; and that it is impossible to laugh at any thing ridiculous without pointing at him. Ignorant as I am, and ignorant as to the world you have declared me to be, I could point out to your perusal volumes upon volumes where you might see, in the regions of Metaphysicks fancy has taken as bold a flight - and that made in the rage for systemising authors of at least as distinguished eminence have laid themselves open to ridicule. - To convince you of the truth of my assertion - I here assure you that the account of the Philosophers in the Rajah and their various absurdities (in all of which you can only see Mr Godwin) was written before I had looked into his book.

As to what you observe of the disadvantages of drawing a narrow circle etc. I perfectly coincide in your opinions: but to which of us the observation is most applicable - the friends to whom we are both but known can but decide. In the little circle of friends by whom I should wish to see myself surrounded I hope the light will always shine of sound judgement, and unsophisticating truth.

You will perhaps think that I have been too severe. But remember it was not I who sought the contest, though when dragged to it sincerity compelled me to speak as I have done. The same sincerity now dictates the assurance which I give you that resentment has no place in my breast; that I shall never be divested of an interest in your welfare; and that to hear of your happiness will ever confer upon me the sincerest pleasure.

With which assurances I remain

Dear Madam

Your obed Servant

Eliza Hamilton

5 New Mileman St
March 13th 1797

Letter 38: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

April 10

My fair neighbour desires me to announce to you a piece of news, which it is consonant to the regard that both she & I entertain for you, you should rather learn from us than from any other quarter. She bids me remind you of the earnest way in which you pressed me to prevail upon her to change her name, she directs me to add, that it has happened to me, like many other disputants, to be entrapped in my own toils: in short, that we found that there was no way so obvious for her to drop the name of Imlay, as to assume the name of Godwin. Mrs. Godwin (who the devil is that?) will be glad to see you at No. 29, Polygon, Somers Town, whenever you are inclined to favour her with a call.

1 In *Love-Letters*, p. 241.

Letter 39: GODWIN TO HAYS

I think the last respect due to the best of human beings ought not to be deserted by [their friends]. There is not perhaps an individual in my list, whose opinions are not as adverse to religious ceremonies as your own, & who might not with equal propriety shrink from & desert the remains of the first of women. I [admire] your character, I respect your scruples. But I should have thought more highly of you, if, at such a moment, it had been impossible for so cold a reflection to have crossed your mind. Think of the subject again. Consult Holcroft. Act finally upon the genuine decision of your own judgment.

Yours, in sincere friendship

W. Godwin

Sept 15 1797[1]

1 The day of Wollstonecraft's funeral. She died 10 September. Abinger Collection.

Letter 40: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

With this note you will receive all the letters & notes of yours addressed to my wife, that I have been able to find, [unopened] & uninspected, as you desired. I do not however wish to deceive you, you have a very inaccurate notion of the confidences that, between minds of an affectionate cast, subsists in the tender [ ] from which I have been so deplorably cast off, if you can suppose that my wife has not shown me so much of the [ ] letters as relates to myself. But you are still more ignorant of my character, if you imagine that I can [ ] or resentment, at any confession that may have [crept] in from you in the moment of wounded pride.

I have not [included] your letters to yourself, & it is because I think, upon more reflection you will not be [desirous] that I should. I [ ] certain, I cannot help it, an ill opinion of a person who employs a [precaution] of that sort. It was the first thing that fully decided my judgment of [ ] but we [expect] to make this sort of deposit of [confidence] with the persons with whom we have much intercourse. He that [denies] this species of confidence must, as I should think, have a very bad [heart]. I am sure it is a thought that should not [ ] with a [ ] the case is different when the individuals [concerned] were identified as dear. [And] I do not blame your conduct in that article. The other letters I return for the present, not from any motive that respects myself, but to give you time to reconcile the subject.

The letter which now lies before me, is not the only letter I have lately seen of yours, in which you trumpet forth the praises of disingenuousness. I am happy, when I see a person set up for a preacher of immorals to see them doing it in terms that must be repugnant to the feelings of every uncorrupted [heart/breast]. I can truly say that no confidences you ever placed in me, lowered you in my esteem. I feel for disappointment, & sympathise with distress. But I have been less pleased with you, since you became in your own opinion, a considerable author, & a power "not altogether insignificant". To speak plainly, I think you have [lost] a little of that simplicity & mildness, which so well becomes a woman as a human creation.

But though you have in this respect become a little less pleasing to me I trust in your good sense to [bring] you back to nature, as I can still respect your good qualities without being blind to your faults. There has been some misapprehension between us lately about visits. I expressed what I thought was an [opinion] that you intended to visit no more & at present I had rather be visited than visit. This put out of my mind any idea of [making] the first visit. Do not let us stand upon bitter [words], &, if you have any satisfaction & pleasure in seeing me, do not be prevented by those little suspicions or [ ], which, if not carefully watched, are apt to creep in upon us & discolour the mind. I am your friend. I thank you for the sympathy I am sure you felt for my distress, though it has been silent.

W. Godwin

Oct 5 1797

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1 Abinger Collection.

Letter 41: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

You have remarked, I am told, that there are some letters written by you to my wife, that are not in the parcel I have returned to you. If you doubt my veracity, when I said that what I sent was all I was able to find, it would be idle in me to repeat the assertion.

I am not determined as to returning some letters to me. It is true, that I know no motive respecting myself for detaining them. But the recalling them is such a breach of the principles of confidence & cordiality that holds society together, that I hesitate as to the affording it this least [countenance?]. In the meantime I am resolved not to correspond with anyone on such terms, & therefore, till you recall your request, I must beg leave to return any letters you shall write to me in future, unopened.

I feel considerable kindness & sympathy for you. But, while you treat, not my principles (to call them the principles of an individual would be to degrade them), but the principles that oppose shameless adultery & support decorum, as "false heroism & ridiculous philosophy", & the conduct, which sentiments not unfriendly have [ ] to [ ] towards yourself, as "tyranny", - shall I confess it? - I almost fear that much benefit is not likely to result from our intercourse.

I would willingly do anything in my power to soothe your painful feelings. I did not feel, [ ] to create it, that there was a breach between us. Your passionate answer to my kind observation on Sunday the ninth of September, "that we felt ourselves much obliged to you for your kindness, but that my wife had already every attendant necessary, & that therefore we should not find it requisite to trouble you", I should probably, if you had thought perhaps had forgotten.

To convince you how confidently I expected your calling on me, let me remark, that I had laid [out] separately some remembrances of my wife which I thought might be acceptable to you, & had determined, forgetting your behaviour of the kind above mentioned, to receive you with every degree of kindness of which I was capable. The time, I believe [will come] when you will [deny] the sacrificing some of the most solid pleasures of life, to the gratification of an irritable temper, & a disposition upon the watch for offence.

W. Godwin

Oct 10 1797

1 Abinger Collection.

Letter 42: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

The letter I have just received from you does you considerable credit. And, in spite of the prejudices you have elaborately impressed on my mind, raises you in my esteem. I am sorry there are other parts of the letter that have a contrary tendency.

You allude to our conversation of Tuesday or Wednesday, seven weeks ago, & strive to retort on me the charge of impropriety. I can only say that, if the conversation were written down aided by our joint recollections, there could scarcely be a dissentent opinion among its readers. I can only repeat my conviction, that my answer to your selfish, unhandsome & passionate attack, was exemplary moderate. No doubt I felt it; probably the feeling might influence the tone of my voice; but I governed my words. You are welcome to Mrs Vaughan's applause in the business. Your account of your conversation with that lady about her own affairs, is probably accurate, I hope, however, that you were guided in the advice you gave, as I am satisfied you were in the epithets of false heroism & ridiculous philosophy, by personal feelings, towards me.

You tell me that the assuming manners of which I have accused you, resulted from a spirit resisting imposition. This is rather an unfortunate account of the matter, as there is, to the best of my recollection, no one of our common friends from whom I have not lately heard repeated complaints against you of the same nature. Which is most probable, that they are all united in the imposition you talk of, or that the spirit of imposition dwells in your own breast? I still adhere to my former solution; & ascribe it to a newly hatched literary vanity.

But, what is most material, is the charge of tyranny which you repeat against me, I really wish to come to the consideration of this point with all the sobriety I am master of. If I were governed by the vanity of an author, that would not account for the phenomenon, since you acquit me of this tyranny in the early part of our acquaintance, when I was as fully vested in the honours of an author as at present & when I wore them with a newer gloss. Believe me, Miss Hays, the alteration is in you & not in me. I used more harsh & if that were the proper epithet tyrannical expressions in our early discussions, than I have ever done since, I would convince you of this by refreshing your memory. But then you took them in good part.

I wish now, in all good-humour & kindness, to call you to the examination of the result, I cannot, I am afraid, alter my manners. They have ever been the same to you, as now, & the same to you as to any human being whom I thought it worth my while to talk much with. But what is the consequence? I cannot hereafter talk to you of any thing, you say, or any thing you think, but you will, I doubt not, be looking out for this bugbear, this disguised or unsuspected tyranny. I cannot talk to you frankly, but I shall continually be stopped by the recollection, not merely not only that I shall not have a fair hearing, but

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1 Abinger Collection.

that my well-intentioned remarks will be construed into tyranny. Believe me, this sort of charge is the bane of all cordiality, & (what you have lately set your face against) unreserve.

Well then, suffer me to ask you whether thus circumstanced, it does not appear, as I said in my last letter, that our intercourse is not likely to be attended with much benefit? We are, at present, twin stars, that cannot shine in the same hemisphere. Hays cannot admit of an equal, nor Godwin, in this case, of a superior. Is it not better then to rest, for some time at least, in that esteem, with which your letter now before me has unfeigned impressed me?

I am far from meaning to recommend that we should never see each other. When we meet by accident, our mutual esteem will, I hope, produce the fruits of mutual good will. I wish to see you in order that I may give you any trifles belonging to your friend, that might happen to be acceptable to you. But intimacy, I am afraid you have precluded.

W. Godwin

Oct 22 1797

Letter 43: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

You appear to me not to attend properly to the distinction between intimacy & mutual esteem. It is with some reluctance I separate myself from you as to the former. But I am not of a temper to support an intercourse where all my words & actions are to be tortured, & misconstrued into tyranny. If I know anything, I know that those very things which you have characterised by that approbrious name, flowed solely from kindness & singleness of heart.

So much for intimacy. Of your esteem I believe it is not in your power to deprive me. As little do I wish to withhold mine from you. There is therefore no reason why we should avoid each other. All I object to, is long & confidential conversations, which, as I have said before, you have precluded by poisoning the very springs of confidence. I shall be gratified, if you will call on me to receive the trifles that have been mentioned. There is no reason in the world why you should not call, as often as you wish, to see the children, or to see me, when you shall be desirous of hearing of my health or prosperity. There are not a great many persons in whose peace I more interest myself than I do in yours; though you by the jaundice in your own eye, have compelled me to put a curb upon myself as to the means, most obviously in my power, of contributing to it.

The question you start of your Manuscript is of a different nature.[2] Friendly criticism is beyond most things a matter of a confidential nature. It is with caution & trepidation I ever venture upon it. I am nothing in that field, if not perfectly free. After what has passed between us upon this occasion, I should watch my words, & be perplexed beyond the limits between honesty & the fear of misconstruction. I should torment myself in vain, & I cannot attempt the task.

W. Godwin

Oct 27 1797

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1 Abinger Collection.

2 The manuscript of *The Victim of Prejudice* which, although not published until 1799, was being read by Godwin in November 1797. See journal entries for 23, 24, 25 November in the Abinger Collection.

Letter 44: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

I am very sorry you have put yourself to the trouble of explaining to me your personal circumstances; yet I cannot convict myself of impropriety in those words of mine that occasioned it. In mixed company I can to a certain degree play the man of the world; but in tete-à-tete I must be simple, honest & ingennuous, & fairly say almost anything that occurs to my mind. I was mortified however by the temper with which you received what was meant for a very cursory remark. Your speech about postage, backed soon after by something of a similar tendency which I have since forgotten, extorted it from me. By your minute detail, you seem (as far as I dare venture to judge) to exculpate yourself.

I am much obliged to you for what you add respecting the person whose confidence you at present enjoy.[2] I believe such confessions are fairly due, & wish I had known it sooner. That man has something in him that instinctively repells me, & I should despair of being upon terms of unbounded cordiality with any one of whom he was the chosen companion. Do not construe me in this to mean more than I do. I have a great regard for some persons that cultivate his society, & for you I entertain a real esteem.

Permit [then] to subscribe myself,

your friend,

W Godwin

Dec 26. 1797

1 In *Love-Letters*, pp. 241-42.

2 Probably Charles Lloyd. See chapter one of this study.

Letter 45: GODWIN TO HAYS[1]

You last note has put a bar in the way of my calling on you, to which I was otherwise inclined. The answer I wrote you last week was prompted by no other sentiment, than sympathy for the unworthy treatment you had received, & the anxious desire to assuage the painfulness of your feelings on the subject.[2] The distortion of mind with relation to me, that could make you find "asperity" in such an answer, is not a thing pleasant to contemplate.

I have in a great measure removed the bar your note created, by the very act of mentioning to you how egregiously you perverted my meaning. —Explanation cannot alter anything, either in my answer or your note, & will therefore best be omitted. I intend myself the pleasure, if you will allow me to interpret your silence into a permission to do so, of calling on you soon.

Your sincere well wisher
W Godwin

Thursday Mar. 19 [1800]

1 In *Love-Letters*, p. 242.

2 Possibly occasioned by the Lloyd affair which came to an embarassing conclusion in 1799-1800. See chapter one of this study.

Letter 46: ELIZABETH GREGORY TO HAYS

My dear Miss Hays

The uneasiness I felt on perusing your melancholy letter on Saturday was increased by the necessity I was under of dispatching [sic] your messenger without a line in return. But I was fully occupied & had an appointment on business to which I was compelled to attend, & the subsequent fatigue & care of removal have left me no leisure for writing since we arrived here. I am sincerely pained at the despondency you express for however we may differ in some opinions, there are many more in which I feel self-elation in believing we agree. If, as I am gratified by your assurance, my good opinion is still far from indifferent to you, rely upon my cordial sympathy in every happy, or every disastrous event that can befal you. No defence of your conduct can be necessary to me, nor to any with whom you are acquainted, & if in vindication of Miss Hamilton I urged anything that bore such an implication, I must have widely deviated from my meaning. I meant not, I could not possibly mean to wound you in the slightest degree, but to exculpate her as in similar circumstances I would exculpate you, from the suspicion of being motivated by the diabolical spirit of revenge. Of this I am convinced she is incapable. She considered, what I believe was generally understood, the novels of Emma Courtney, & the Victim of Prejudice as systematic productions, composed for the purpose of exhibiting the evils which resulted from certain opinions & practises established in the world, & sanctioned by it. These she considered as salutary checks upon the vicious propensities of mankind, & every attempt to destroy them as calculated to have an injurious operation upon the best interests of society. With these sentiments the virtues or talents of those who opposed them must have been so far from an argument to withhold her vindication that they must have had a directly contrary tendency & must have enforced the necessity of endeavouring to expose what she conceived to be pernicious & erroneous opinions, when sanctioned by such authorities. In endeavouring to exemplify the principles of what has been called the "new philosophy" reduced to practise, she has I am convinced, intended no personal attack & would be extremely pained at the idea of wounding you. Indeed, my dear Miss Hays you must pardon me for saying that this supposition is not consonant to your usual kindness & candour, in which I have never known you surprised.

Miss Hamilton tho' hurt by your review of the Rajah (w^{ch} you have conceived the foundation of this affair) ascribed not to you any motive but zeal for the opinions you had embraced. Is not the same allowance to be made for her? I have urged the more in vindication of Miss Hamilton because should what I had to urge have some effect in persuading you that however bad the world might be, wanton malevolence was not the certain consequence of an intercourse with those who were not entitled to the appellation of tried friends. That you should ever have experienced malignity I lament but still more do I grieve at the keen sense you entertain of it. Most however of what has pained you is discreditted by all, even probably by the persons from whom it issued, & if still

remembered it can only be so as an effusion of that party spirit which all who dissent from established opinion expect an attack. Instead of courting solitude let me advise you to come into general society from which you may benefit but from which you will receive no injury. You need not shrink from the display of your heart & conduct. Rally your spirits there is I trust much of happiness remaining for you, & that every good, present & future may be your portion is the earnest wish of one who conceives that the want of a perfect conformity of opinion is no impediment to the assurance that she is sincerely your friend.

E. Gregory[1]

Low Leyton
March 28th [1801]

1 Elizabeth, Dr Gregory's sister with whom Hays was friendly.

Letter 47: MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT TO HAYS. Undated letter.[1]

I have sent you the Gossip's Story to review, as you wish to read it, but I would thank you if you would do it immediately, because Johnson is in want of materials for the present month.[2] The great merit of this work is, in my opinion, the display of the small causes which destroy matrimonial felicity & peace. In reviewing will you pardon me? you seem to run into an error which I have laboured to cure in myself: you allude to things in the work which can only be understood by those who have read it, instead of, by a short summary of the contents, or an account of the incident on which the interest turns, enabling a person to have a clear idea of a book, which they have never heard of before. I would explain myself better, were I not in haste.

I expect Mrs. Robinson[3] & daughter to drink tea with me on thursday, will you come to meet them. She has read your novel, & was very much pleased with the main story; but did not like the conclusion. She thinks the death of Augustus the end of the story, and that the husband should have been suffered to die a natural death. Perhaps she is right. I know my sympathy ceased at the same place; but I thought that was owing to having had a peep behind the curtain.[4] I shall expect you. Adieu!

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1 In *Love-Leters*, pp. 240-41.

2 Joseph Johnson co-publisher of the *Analytical Review*. The review appears in *Analytical Review*, 25 (1797), dating this late 1796 or early 1797.

3 Mary Robinson 1758-1800. Otherwise known as 'Perdita'.

4 This probably refers to Wollstonecraft's knowledge of Hays's real experience within the novel.

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